• TAMERA RUSSELL • SAFE SPACES • COLE MENDEZ • BLACK GRAMMYS • MUSIC CODING • & MORE • FEB 2017 •

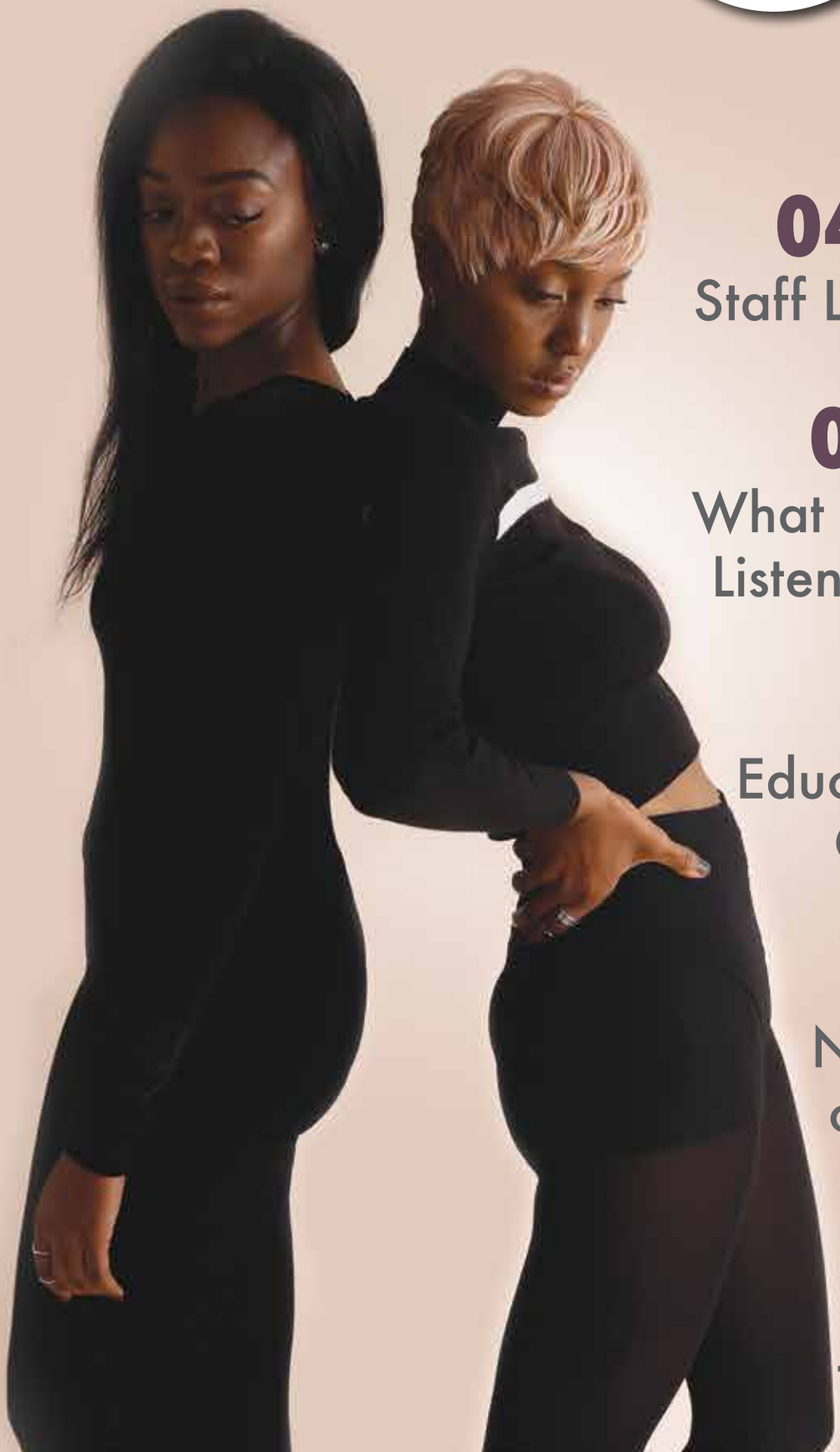
the hart house music magazine

# demo

# BIZZARH

*a conversation on how to craft new narratives*

# CON

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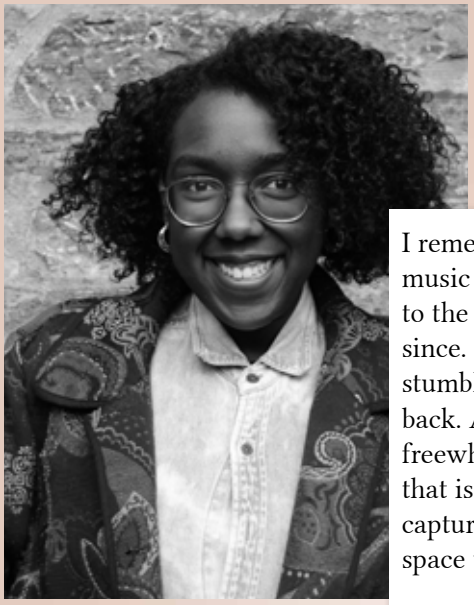
# MASTHEAD



## Melissa Vincent
### *Editor-in-Chief*

I remember my introduction to *demo* vividly. After a chance meeting with this year's music coordinator, Aviva, in my first year, she did everything but drag me by the arm to the first meeting, and I have had my feet firmly planted in the *demo* community ever since. Reminiscing on my experience has made me wonder not only how our writers stumbled into *demo* but exactly which of the magazine's qualities keep them coming back. Aside from being an ever-growing community that is endlessly supportive and freewheelin' in its playfulness, I think much of it has to do with an unfettered freedom that is surprisingly rare in campus spaces. Both intensely personal and capable of capturing board opinions, *demo* remains a platform where our writers not only have space to experiment with their prose but with their ideas.

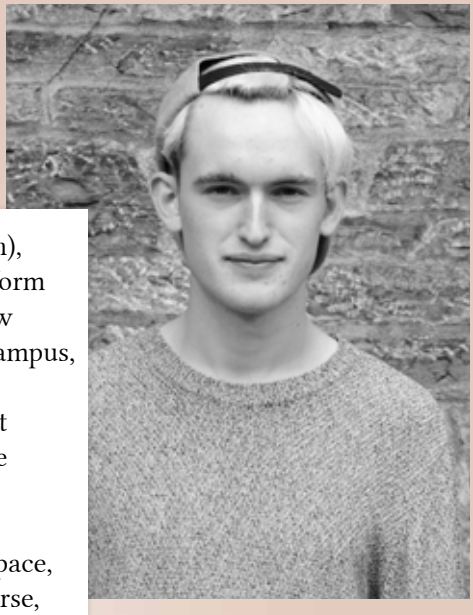
*Demo* is not just a subversive music publication with a penchant for hot takes but also a landing site for poignant commentary on the new and ongoing challenges facing music scenes on a larger scale. The tone of this year's issue continues our tradition of pushing the envelope in order to capture student responses to an increasingly precarious social paradigm. Our articles this year are poignant, direct, and, above all, gutsy as hell. I anticipate that they will pry open a conversation, with good reason; the time for complacency is past and our writers are pushing for direct action. You should probably take notes. Thanks to everyone that's joined us on this journey, you are forever in our hearts (and you should probably take notes as well).

## Ayla Shiblaq
### *Managing Online Editor*

I cannot imagine my time at the University of Toronto without *demo*. This is super cheesy and definitely not something clever where I drop a bunch of Kanye lines about how awesome I am but seriously, *demo* shaped my University of Toronto experience. In high school I always wanted a reliable concert buddy. Through *demo*, I have found a community of concert buddies who have introduced me to amazing music and the coolest venues in Toronto (RIP S.H.I.B.G.B's ❤). *Demo* is everything I wanted in my squad goals: hangouts, dynamic effort and talent, and everyone letting me freak out about how much I adore St. Vincent. Being a part of the masthead this year was a privilege I never expected, and it has been a heck of a ride. Thank you, *demo,* for keepin' it 3 hunna; thanks to you, I have never felt alone in the Toronto music scene.

# D LETTERS

## Stuart Oakes
### *Editor-in-Chief*



In first year, four (and a half million) years ago (yes, I am old, and yes, I fear death), one of my professors narrativized that the graphic novel had blossomed as an artform because no one paid any attention to it. If no one is paying attention, there are few rules. *Demo* can be read in much the same way: perched a little precariously on campus, without the prestige of a literary journal but not quite cool enough to sit with the art publications either. Instead, it occupies a less visible space; somewhere without the crushing weight of *all those readers*. Hidden in the back of the garden with the overlooked weeds and the little clusters of mushrooms, *demo* has bloomed.

Is this reading entirely accurate? No, but there is at least some truth to it. In the space, the time, and the freedom *demo* has been given, it has grown significantly. Of course, hopefully, it will continue to do so. Attention is no more than what these insightful, dedicated, wonderful writers and artists deserve. However, I also hope that *demo* will stay a misfit, even after it becomes bewilderingly famous and influential (do not hold your breath; your uncle's punk zine has a larger circulation). Those qualities have attracted a really wonderful community, and I am grateful to have been a part of it. As such, thank you to everyone who has been involved here, online, and at the hangouts and meetings. It has been an honour and a pleasure.

I first learned about *demo* amid the chaos of Frosh week, before I had even stepped foot into any of my classes. My contributions to the print issue started off small: I contributed to layout first year, wrote an article second year, and now I have been given the opportunity to make an even greater contribution as Design Editor. Getting this position taught me many a thing, but most importantly it taught me the beauty in having people believe and trust in you and your abilities. So I wanted this issue to be a thank you: to all the incredible writers who dedicated so much of themselves and their time to bring to light the issues within the music scene; to everyone who helped with design; and to the truly inspirational people with whom I share a masthead position. And to you, for reading this and picking up our issue. I hope it serves you well.

## Yasmine El Sanyoura
### *Design Editor*

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# John Monahan
## *Hart House Warden*

Welcome to the Spring 2017 issue of *demo*. With the University of Toronto devoting significant resources to determining how it will respond to the calls to action from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this issue's theme of Representation and Reclaiming Space is perhaps more pertinent and pressing than ever.

Hart House has recently completed a new five-year Strategic Plan highlighting the key themes of Diversity, Exploration and Engagement. Hart House is committed to becoming an even more inclusive, welcoming and respectful space where students of all communities, backgrounds, identities, and abilities see themselves reflected; where they come together to learn about themselves, one another and the world beyond U of T in an atmosphere of collaboration, common interest and community. Student publications like this magazine are essential to that undertaking. *Demo* provides an important way of establishing connection between students and the broader community beyond Hart House's walls. The arts and arts-related journalism can play a powerful role in reclaiming space, providing a platform to previously-unheard voices, and creating new communities-of-interest that are equitable and inclusive. The arts do not merely reflect the world as it is; rather, they are fundamentally creational, and help to point out new ways of understanding and relating to our world both as it is and as it could be.

Since becoming Warden last year I have had the extraordinary privilege of meeting and working with countless dedicated and engaged students from all across the University who have made Hart House their home. Those whose connection to the House is primarily defined by their love of music in one form or another infuse our community with a particular energy and vitality. I would like to extend a special thanks to the team who put together this most recent issue of *demo*, and to the rest of the Music Committee who do such important work to ensure that Hart House pulsates with as wide a variety of musical sounds and rhythms as there are members of the House.

# Zoë Dille
## *Music Committee Staff Advisor*

When I asked the co-editors of *demo* to describe the focus of this issue I was told it was about two things: Representation and Reclaiming Space. On the surface these might not sound like areas that intersect smoothly with music but upon closer inspection, they couldn't be better aligned if they tried. What is music after all but a representation of multiple identities, a space that allows people to be who they are; to be larger than themselves, or to be perceived and experienced differently. Music presents a platform where artists from one identity can champion another and where musicians can stake a claim as messengers of social justice, peace, love and life.

Hart House is also interested in representation, as a site of Debate and Dialogue, Art and Culture and Recreation and Wellness, we pride ourselves on being an inclusionary space, one that encourages the sharing of identities, stories and experiences in a welcoming community. We are pleased to support and present multiple genres of music as well as opportunities for students to engage with music from behind the scenes, as performers and fans.

*Demo* invites readers to explore musical traditions, unpack the science and philosophy behind music and be moved by its emotive power. By the time this issue comes out, there will be a new US President and a globalization will have advanced even more. Countless other world stories will also have unfolded in the news, some tragic some triumphant; but what remains a constant is our understanding and hope in the power of music and arts to continue to be a common space for our shared humanity. Music is the healing hand that connect and inform us across our difference. What's your verse?

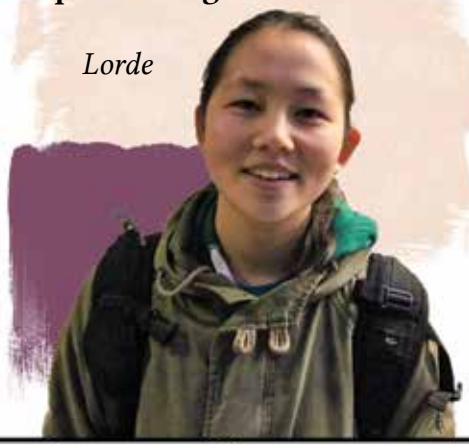
# WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?

***Demo* checks in with U of T students to see what music they have been feeling lately.**

**ARMAN ADEL**

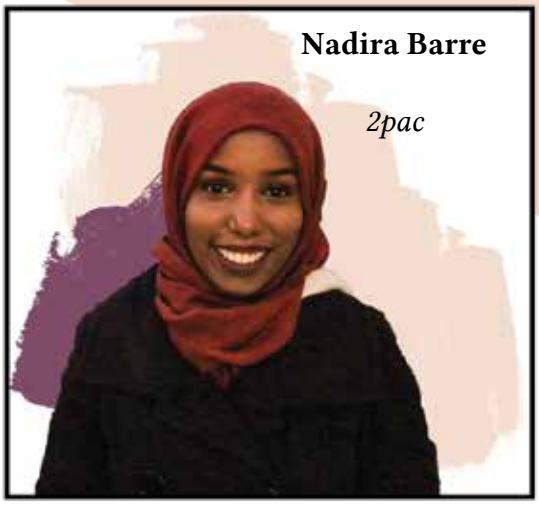
**Daphne Wang**

*Lorde*



**Nadira Barre**

*2pac*



**Tanya Dushatska**

*Bomb the Music Industry*

**Edgar Vargas**

*Early Mercy*

**Lana El Sanyoura**

*Billy Joel*

**Rania Mansour**

*Mozart*

© Photos by Rachel Evangeline Chiong, Jennifer Hyc, Chuyue Zhan.

# EDUCATE, CREATE, CULTIVATE

## How U of T has contributed to Toronto's music scene

**Kalina Nedelcheva**

## JONNY DOVERCOURT INTERVIEW

It is easy to associate Toronto's early 1990s independent music scene with Jonathan Bunce, better known by most as Jonny Dovercourt. Often lauded for his outstanding work founding Wavelength, a Toronto-based weekly music series and zine, over the last 17 years he has also built an impressive portfolio as an editor, writer, musician, and organizer. Since "only 90s kids will remember," Dovercourt agreed to share his wisdom as an alumni at the University of Toronto and answer some unanswered questions about the music dynamics of the institution. As an added bonus, Bunce also gave us a list of bands with roots at U of T that are well worth lending an ear.

**In a few sentences, how was the music scene at U of T when you attended the institution?**

There was not much of a music scene on campus when I attended in the mid-1990s, besides a few bands that would play orientation events. I had to go off-campus to hear new or interesting music, at many of the city's established live music clubs on Queen West or College Street.

**How did U of T help facilitate real talent and extend it to Toronto scene?**

U of T helped support the Toronto music scene through coverage in student papers such as *The Varsity* (where Pitchfork writer Stuart Berman got his start) and *The Gargoyle* (where yours truly got his start writing about the local scene), and airplay on CIUT 89.5 FM—which has hosted countless influential radio shows, including The Masterplan, Mods and Rockers, No Beat Radio, Equalizing X-Distort, and Dementia 13. Canadian post-rock Do Make Say Think rehearsed in the basement of the old CIUT studio at 91 St. George St. in their early days, and recorded their 1998 debut album there.

**How did U of T connect musicians? Students with students and students with faculty?**

I think it happened organically—more likely students connecting with fellow students through institutions such as CIUT that supported local and underground music. I met a lot of fellow musicians through writing for *The Gargoyle*, as people in bands would give me their indie cassettes or CDs to review in the paper.

**What would be an ideal viral campaign for a band?**

That's a tough question to answer—and the answer would be worth a lot of money to people in the music industry!—but I would say something original and innovative that gets people talking is at the core of any successful viral campaign.

### The Government 1971-1982

Showing that U of T students can do it all, these Toronto punk pioneers have a U of T representative in the form of Andy J. Paterson who played guitar and did vocals for these local mainstays. His assertive, often unchanging tone, never failed to provide a social commentary which gave the band the quintessence of 1980s punk. The Government are a crucial part of Toronto's punk canon.

**Notable Releases:** *Electric Eye* (1980)

### Republic of Safety & The Barcelona Pavilion 2001-2005

Assembled of Maggie McDonald, Kat Gligorjevic and Jonny Dovercourt (!!), the band created their own "fake" nation with a dedicated cult following to go along with it. Fusing diplomacy with hard-hitting riffs, the post-punk band constructed a politically utopian Canada.

**Notable Releases:** *It's Because of the Barcelona Pavilion* (2005)

### Dan Snaith (aka Caribou, Manitoba, & Daphne) 2001-present

Dan Snaith who performs under the moniker Caribou, Daphni, and formerly as Manitoba is a math whiz by day who performs an equivalent form of wizardry in the form of surrealist, neo-electronica by night. A percussionist who is often joined onstage by a full band, he landed a spot on the *Polaris Music Prize* list for best Canadian album in 2010 and 2013 and won in 2008.

**Notable Releases:** *Up in Flames* (2003), *Andorra* (2007), *Swim* (2010)

### The Hidden Cameras 2001-present

This indie-pop supergroup folk band claim U of T alumni Joel Gibb and Maggie MacDonald as members. Once described by Gibb as "gay church folk music", The Hidden Cameras have been a pivotal part of Toronto's LGBTQA music movement.

**Notable Releases:** *The Smell of Our Own* (2003)

### Owen Pallett 2005-present

Owen Pallett might best be described as the crossroads where poetry meets experimental, technicolor soundscapes. In 2002 before graduating at U of T, he managed to write two operas, impressive to say the least.

**Notable Releases:** *He Poos Clouds* (2006), *In Conflict* (2014)

### Majid Jordan (Majid Al Maskati & Jordan Ullman) 2011-present

This contemporary R&B duo met at U of T in 2011. Today Al Maskati and Ullman continue to produce dream-like beats that are intermediately cut by their poppy yet lulling vocals which juxtapose their wildly creative music videos. Perhaps their most notable career highlight was their co-production on Drake's chart-topping 2013 single, "Hold On, We're Going Home."

**Notable Releases:** *Majid Jordan* (2016)

### More Artists:

**Bahamas** (Felicity Williams) / **Beams** (Anne Merkiens) / **DIANA** / **Fake Palms** (Mike Le Riche) / **Fucked Up** / **Greys** (Shehzaad Jiwani) / **HSY** (Brandom Lim) / **The Meligrove Band** (Mike Small) / **Pantayo** (Kat Estacio) / **The Two Koreas** (Stuart Berman)

# FINDING NEW SOUNDS ON CAMPUS:

## A List Of Musical Events For The Coming Months

Christian Schoug

## HART HOUSE

Hart House's Music Committee hosts a regular Open Mic one Thursday a month in the Arbor Room. The schedule for the rest of the year is:

| | |
|---|---|
| JANUARY 26, 2017 | 8:00 PM |
| FEBRUARY 16, 2017 | 8:00 PM |
| MARCH 30, 2017 | 8:00 PM |

The Hart House Orchestra rehearses all year in preparation for a few seasonal recitals. You can find them performing in the Hart House Great Room.

| | |
|---|---|
| NOVEMBER 10, 2016 FALL RECITAL | 8:00 PM |
| FEBRUARY 16, 2017 WINTER RECITAL | 8:00 PM |
| APRIL 6, 2017 SPRING RECITAL | 8:00 PM |

The Hart House Symphonic Band holds a concert in the Great Hall at the end of the school year.

| | |
|---|---|
| APRIL 2, 2017 | 6:00 PM |

UofT Idol is a monthly vocal competition held in the Hart House Arbor Room, with the rounds occurring on the following dates:

| | |
|---|---|
| JANUARY 19, 2017 | 8:30 PM |
| FEBRUARY 9, 2017 | 8:30 PM |
| MARCH 16, 2017 FINAL ROUND | 8:30 PM |

Sunday Concerts is the crowning aspect of Hart House's concert series. You can catch these events in the Great Hall.

| | |
|---|---|
| APRIL 9, 2017 DOUBLE DOUBLE DUO | 6:00 PM |

Hart House also has a Jazz Night circuit held every Friday at 9:00 PM in the Arbor Room. Their dedicated Jazz Ensemble also holds occasional events that alternate between Hart House and The Rex.

Hart House Chorus also performs an end-of-term recital in the Great Hall. Follow them at (https://www.facebook.com/HHChorus/) to find more information when it is scheduled!

## VICTORIA COLLEGE

Vic Records will be hosting two recorded open mics in the winter semester in the Cat's Eye!
Check Facebook.com/realvicrecords for updated dates.

The Cat's Eye plans to host local acts about once a month. Information about those events will be posted to their Facebook page: Facebook.com/thecatseye.

## TRINITY COLLEGE

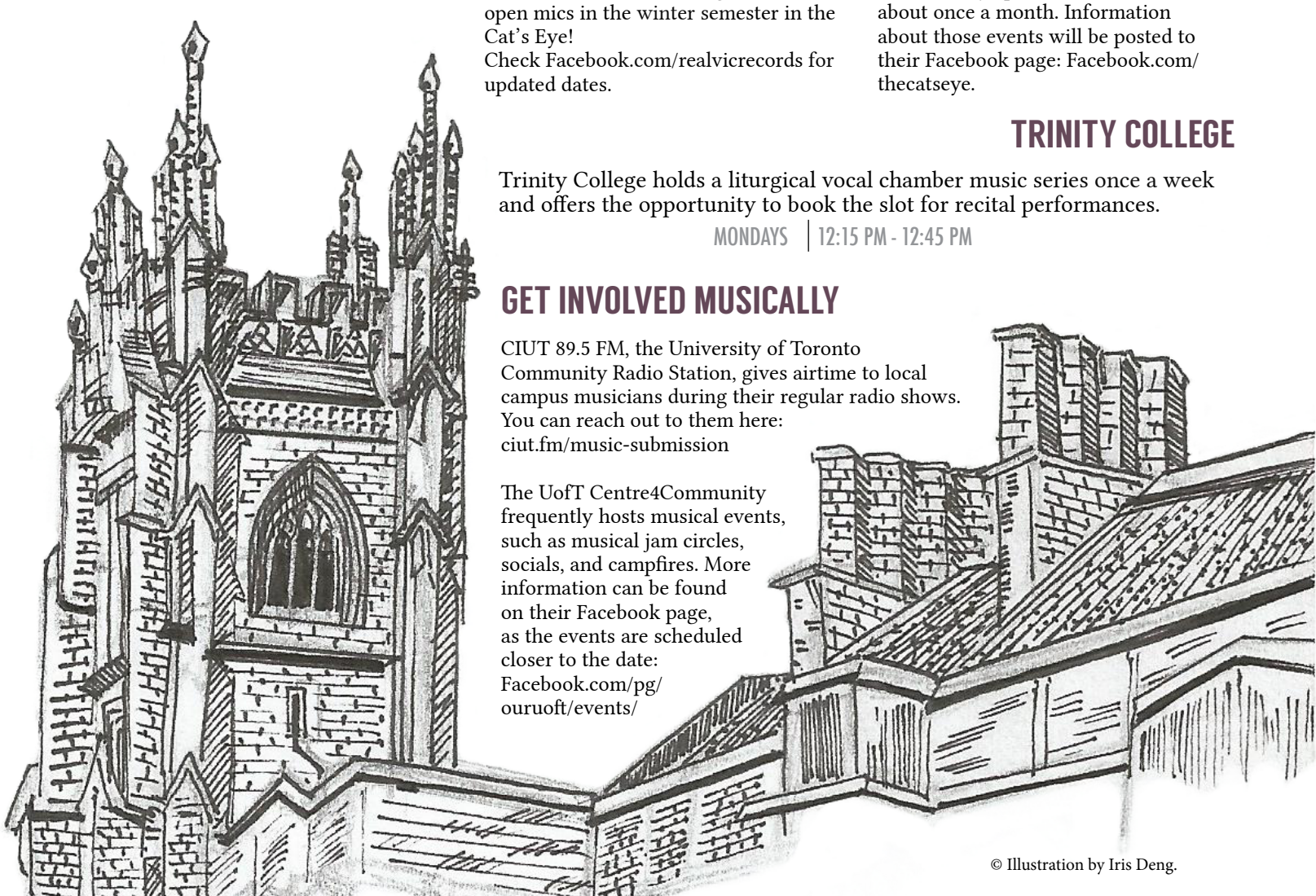
Trinity College holds a liturgical vocal chamber music series once a week and offers the opportunity to book the slot for recital performances.

| | |
|---|---|
| MONDAYS | 12:15 PM - 12:45 PM |

## GET INVOLVED MUSICALLY

CIUT 89.5 FM, the University of Toronto Community Radio Station, gives airtime to local campus musicians during their regular radio shows. You can reach out to them here: ciut.fm/music-submission

The UofT Centre4Community frequently hosts musical events, such as musical jam circles, socials, and campfires. More information can be found on their Facebook page, as the events are scheduled closer to the date: Facebook.com/pg/ouruoft/events/

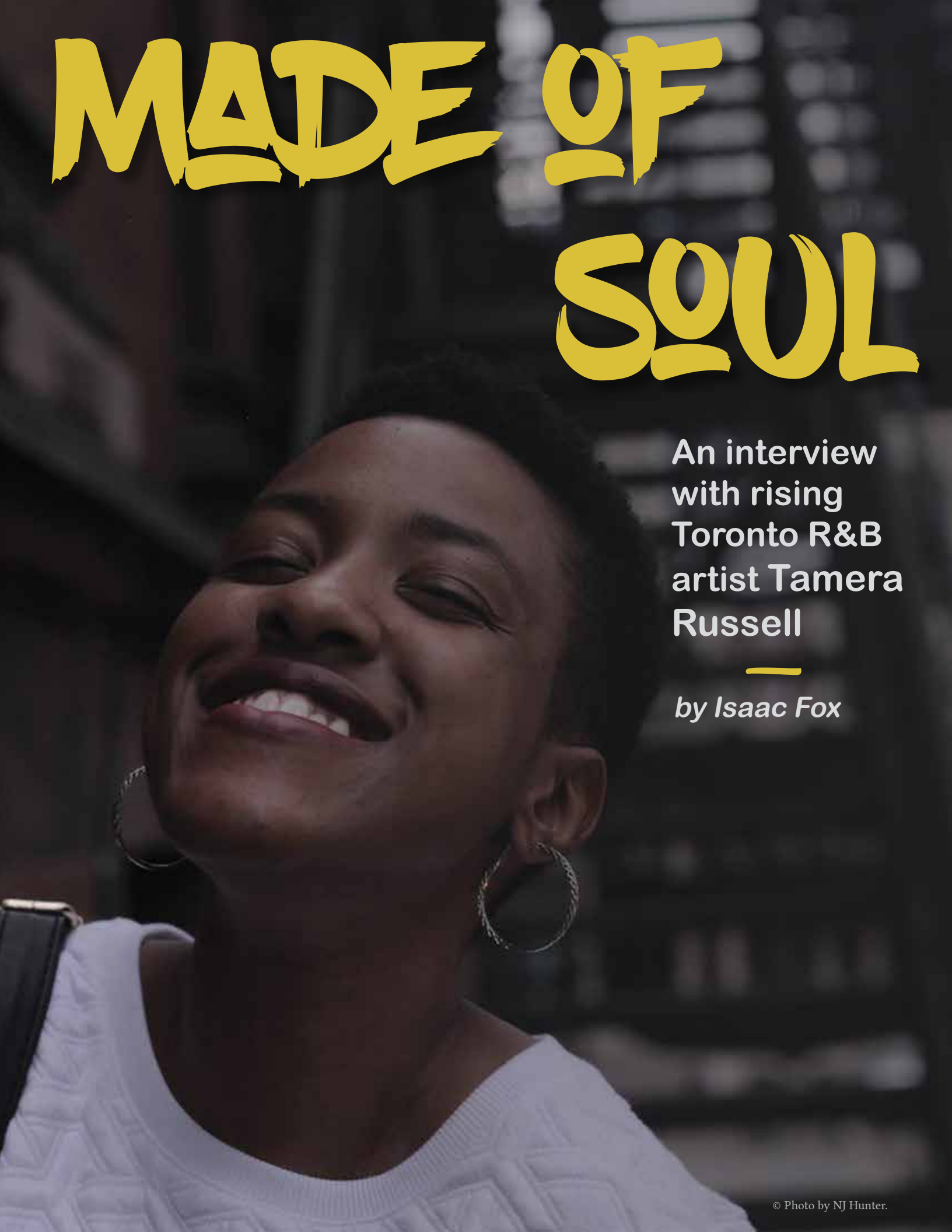


© Illustration by Iris Deng.

# MADE OF SOUL

An interview with rising Toronto R&B artist Tamera Russell

*by Isaac Fox*



© Photo by NJ Hunter.

Amid the 6ix's ocean of talented, ambitious underground artists, singer-producer Tamera Russell stands out. Her voice—full, undeniably gritty, and yet silky-smooth—reverberates throughout each track. Her lyrics are equally stirring and touch on love, loss, depression, and the value of her own black life. At age 22, she could already be considered prolific. The self-described disciple of artists like Lauryn Hill and Jill Scott already has a dense catalog of music stretching from 2015's *Sweet Tooth* EP to her first album, *Cavity* (self-produced in collaboration with Brampton's Martin Sole), which was released in the summer of 2016. This is not to mention a slew of soulful Soundcloud loosies and the ever-growing number of tracks she has produced for other artists. *Demo* sat down with Tamera in the heart of Kensington Market to discuss her artistic journey, her experiences in Toronto's music scene, and her views on policing in the GTA.

**How did you first get into music?**

When I first started singing I was about…four years old, from what I remember. Playing music and everything started around my mid-teens—I was thirteen when I taught myself to play piano. I had a drum kit too, but we kept on moving houses, and every time we moved, I lost pieces of the drum kit 'til all I had left was a drumstick, so I stuck with piano. Then I'd always been writing poetry, so in senior year I started thinking, "I should turn my poetry into songs," and I learned how to produce 'cause I wanted to learn to do it myself. So music's always been a part of me; I'm a singer first, a writer second, and then a producer last.

**Who were some of your biggest influences growing up?**

Lauryn Hill was definitely one of them, that's super evident. Erykah Badu, that's also hella evident. Jill Scott—I really love her, especially 'cause I used to write poetry. I grew up in the Church, too, so all the musicality of gospel spoke to me—Kirk Franklin, Hezekiah Walker, those types of names. Donnie Hathaway, Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, there's so many to name.

**On your Soundcloud bio, you describe yourself as a "young, black, gifted, disabled female—if labeled by society; musician nonetheless." How do you think these aspects of you influence your voice and your music?**

Well, for those who don't know, my disability comes from when I was born – the doctor pulled on my head and popped a nerve in my spinal cord. Several surgeries later, it left me with a smaller left hand with limited motion. I've faced twenty-two years of living with that condition, overcoming obstacles, and when you add on being a young black woman in this society, it's undeniably difficult, you know? There's a lot of labels hanging over my head, and as far as my music, I just want to challenge the labels that I'm associated with and destroy the stigma that comes with them. 'Cause all I can do is sing about what I know.

**I wanted to ask about Redway, who passed away last year. He's obviously an artist that Toronto's music community loved deeply, and you wrote and recorded a tribute to him called "To The Fullest" after his death [available on Soundcloud]. How did you meet Redway and what was his personal impact on you?**

I came into contact with Redway actually through Wondagurl, who I met through this music competition that I lost. She was one of the judges, and afterwards she said "yo, you're dope," and we exchanged our info. So that gets to how I knew Redway. Wondagurl messaged me one day and said "Redway and I are working on a project, you should come through to the studio, we want to have a bunch of creatives in the room." So I went, and this was my first time meeting or even hearing of Redway, and he was just the most pleasant dude. He picked me up from the subway station, and I just sat in on their studio session and took it all in. Wondagurl's working on the beat, he's writing rhymes, he'll probably have a little sip of Henny, but he just had that vision, that mission. I went for a couple more, maybe three or four more sessions, and I remember one time, me and Redway stepped outside together to bun a ting, and we just talked about our influences, and got to know each other's visions even more. And after these twelve hour sessions, he'd drive me home—I live out by York University…wouldn't even let me put any gas in his tank even though he still had to drive all the way back. He was a 'Sauga boy to the bone, man. Just a genuine, smart, kind, funny, and inspiring guy.

**With songs like "Dead Men II," you're clearly artistically invested in speaking on both racial injustice and the injustice within Canada's policing system. Can you share your thoughts on the relationship you see between Torontonians and the Police Department?**

I mean, Canada's no wonderland, and while I haven't ever had any personal dealings with the cops, that doesn't mean I haven't heard from friends and people in my community who've had encounters with them that they see as misconduct. They might not distrust the police overall, but they see it always boiling down to the motives and beliefs of unknown individual cops—how they use their power—and people are scared of that unknown. I can't speak on all police—I mean, I know a cop. But nobody really talks about it here because of the focus on America, and pointing fingers and saying "it's worse over there." So when Black Lives Matter Toronto speaks up, they get hushed. No one's listening. It's a difficult issue, and I don't have the answers, you know? I'm just trying to live.

*Edited and condensed for publication.*

# LOOKING BACK

What are some of *demo*'s cover stars up to today?

**Stuart Oakes**

*Demo*'s history is a mystery to me. I started writing (rap reviews, because of course I did) for the magazine in 2014—my first year of undergrad. That year, *demo* interviewed Toronto's multi-sensory avian staple Zoo Owl for its cover story, a formal precedent that has been followed faithfully in the years since. In 2015, the fantastic art-pop activist Lido Pimienta graced the cover. In 2016, *demo* reached out to out to the insightful non-binary ("human mess") author and songwriter Jordaan Mason. This year we are excited to feature the exhilarating cosmic rap duo Bizzarh. That, however, is the extent of my knowledge regarding *demo* trivia. Of *demo's* ten years prior to 2014, I know little, having heard only myth and seen nothing but the few, grainy images of a "Westsiiiiiiiiide! of Toronto? Exploring Hip Hop in GTA suburbs" cover and something called "Off The Beaten Path." Student publications are like that: editors graduate, print copies disaparate, and a single specimen is perhaps archived in a dark, lonely corner of who-knows-which library. Before I leave *demo*, I would like to shine some present-moment light on those mysterious issues. A tidy place to begin that journey? On solid ground, of course, with an update on our star cover artists of the past three years; the one's this old fogey remembers.

## JORDAAN MASON

Jordaan has been working since I interviewed them. In July 2016, they released "11 short songs about dysphoria, transitioning, becoming, but not becoming anything in particular," titled *form less*. The album was, at least visibly, a success: tapes were "running low" in October and the whole thing got streamed by the big-name tastemakers at Stereogum. Jordaan also recently released a collection of demos for their 2015 album *the decline of stupid fucking western civilization* (both can be found on the "Jordaan Mason" Bandcamp) and some very nice long drone tracks under the Bandcamp name Slow-Blink & Purring. Other announcements included a new band called Winter Sisters, that you should not buy their albums for "ridiculous amounts of money" because they will come back into print, and that you should follow them on Twitter @hymn_her.

## LIDO PIMIENTA

Lido Pimienta has also been making moves. In October 2016, she released her second album, *La Papessa* (find it on her "lido pimienta" Bandcamp). *La Papessa* was several years in the making, and is explicitly political, engaging with a range of issues including the international water crisis, living in a heteronormative, patriarchal society, and life as an outsider—an Afro-Colombian and South American Indigenous woman—in Canadian spaces. She has already begun work on her next release, the "industrial reggaeton" album *Miss Colombia*, according to her Twitter. In the meantime, she has released a series of one-offs on Soundcloud including a stunning re-work of Rihanna's "Work" called "Camellando," has appeared on A Tribe Called Red's 2016 album *We Are The Halluci Nation*, and has snagged a series of excellent interviews with *The Fader*, *Bandcamp Daily*, *Vice*, and *NOW*.

## ZOO OWL

Just after *demo* last talked to Zoo Owl, whose music and live show investigate cyber-organics, biometrics, and light-sensors through experimental dance-floor beats, the dinosaur-loving producer released his first album, *Hollow* (available on Bandcamp). Since then, there has been no hint of new music. Instead, Zoo Owl has been focusing on developing as a live performer. He played Summerworks, Camp Wavelength, and Long Winter in 2016, as well as a seemingly endless number of regular shows around town (check his Facebook page for updates). He has been busy refining his equipment, including an updated version of his infamous light goggles, which resemble bird's eyes shining in the dark.

# HAVE YOU SEEN THESE ARTISTS?

"iLoveMakonnen"

"Ramriddlz"

"Mo-G"

"Roy Woods"

## LAST KNOWN LOCATION: OVO HQ

1-800-ABANDONED

© Photo by Will Goldie.

# LIFE UNDER THE 6IX GOD

Today, Drake reigns as the self-proclaimed "6ix God" of Toronto. However, the true benefit of his presence has been called into question as the local scene continues to struggle out from within his lengthy shadow.

HARRY MYLES

**In April,** I was visiting with an old friend from high school and we came upon the topic of Drake, Toronto's all-mighty ruler. I asked her what she thought of his latest release, *Views,* and she let out a sigh of exasperation. She proceeded to tell me a story about forgotten artists, manipulation, and mistreatment at the hands of the "6 God" and his label, October's Very Own [OVO] Sound. Intrigued, I delved further into the city's rap scene and soon discovered the lesser-known narrative of Drake's Toronto.

Aubrey Drake Graham's story began in 2006 when he portrayed the character Jimmy Brooks on the hit teen drama *Degrassi: The Next Generation.* The fledgling Canadian rapper released his debut mixtape *Room for Improvement* soon after, and over the next decade grew to become a king in his hometown, Toronto, and one of the biggest rap sensations on the planet. Now, Toronto has become synonymous with Drake's personal brand and that of OVO Sound. However, it is still unclear as to whether OVO's domination is a true benefit to Toronto and its diverse range of local talent. Over the past couple of years, allegations have emerged accusing Drake of underpaying, stealing from, and not supporting many of OVO's signees from the downtown core and the GTA. The question remains as to whether the "6 God" is deserving of his title or if he has instead manipulated Toronto's rap scene in order to remain relevant and advance his personal image.

Perhaps feeling self-indulgent in his personal success story, Drake claims in a 2015 Sprite "Obey Your Thirst" video feature that an artist does not have to relocate to a major music city like New York in order to find success. Instead, he recommends that you "do it the way The Weeknd did it, do it the way PartyNextDoor did it, do it the way I did it… Do it from where you're at…If you have the music, that's all it takes." However, skepticism has emerged as to whether is it truly possible to rise to rap superstardom within the current Toronto scene. As Slava Pastuk noted in a 2015 *Noisey* article, the young *Degrassi* star only achieved success because promoter J. Prince flew him to Houston in order to meet Lil Wayne in 2008. As Lil Wayne mentored Drake, the young artist developed a substantial network across the United States, hopping from one city to the next as he gradually constructed a web of collaborators and connections. Now, as one of the most famous rappers in the business, Drake has reclaimed Toronto, continuously expresses pride in his hometown to the point of featuring the CN Tower on the cover of *Views*. OVO Sound has similarly established themselves as the almighty tastemakers of the 6ix and have

worked hard to develop an image of apparent devotion to the local scene. However, in its current state of OVO control, Toronto seems unable to substantially support its rising stars.

Regent Park artist Mo-G is a prime example of mismanagement. In 2015, the Toronto rapper created the "Ginobili Dance," a signature left-handed dance move first seen in his video for "Still [Smoke Dawg]." Drake quickly discovered Mo-G and posted a video of the dance on Instagram. As Mo-G's popularity grew, Drake even mentioned the rapper on hit tracks like "Summer Sixteen" and "Jumpman," and performed the Ginobili Dance in his "Energy" music video. However, Mo-G did not have kind words for the "6 God," recently criticizing OVO founder and Drake's co-manager, Oliver El-Khatib. In a fiery Instagram post, Mo-G asked, "Have you ever heard in the history of hip-hop a man who helps gives [sic] away his creativity and helps make billboard hits but doesn't get paid a dollar for it or one credit for it," claiming in follow up videos that "all [El-Khatib] offered [him was] 500 dollars." Mo-G stated that $500 could not even pay his mother's rent and labeled El-Khatib a "culture vulture." These allegations are the latest in an extensive list of local and international OVO co-signees that have failed to receive support from their label.

**Drake can be seen continuously appearing on popular tracks, promoting his own brand**

iLoveMakonnen, for instance, is an Atlanta rapper who released a hit single, "Tuesday," in 2014. Drake later featured on a remix of the track, and soon after iLoveMakonnen went platinum and received a Grammy nomination. Understandably, OVO signed their newest star, releasing his EP *iLoveMakonnen* that same year. The record saw little ground support from the label, however, and faltered on the charts, plateauing at #72 on Billboard. It's follow-up, *iLoveMakonnen 2,* saw even less support—no social media or radio push, no videos or singles, and fewer big name producers than on the records Makonnen was releasing prior to being signed—and struggled to achieve even this limited success despite being just as catchy.

Other Greater Toronto Area artists have had similar experiences to Mo-G and Makonnen, including Roy Wood$ (a Brampton native) and Ramriddlz (from Mississauga). This has led many to conclude that OVO is manipulating the Toronto scene in order to further the status of their king and maintain the relevance of the "6 God." As Rawiya Kameir reports in a recent article from *The Fader*, the story of an OVO signee proceeds as follows: Drake or another member of his entourage will discover a hot, local unknown artist and make a subsequent post acknowledging them on OVO's social media web. However, after a limited EP release or an initial feature, remix, or video, the signee will receive little sustained support or promotion from the label and its leader and will fade into obscurity. By doing so, OVO maintains the mirage that it is expanding Toronto's scene, and Drake can be seen continuously appearing on popular tracks, promoting his own brand at all times. This act of Drake-centrism began with the Weeknd, the former OVO artist from Scarborough. In a 2015 *Rolling Stone* interview written by Josh Eells, the R&B artist mentioned that he "gave up almost half of [his] album [*House of Balloons*]" to Drake's 2011 critical success *Take Care*. Although the Weeknd has experienced considerable popularity in recent years, he revealed that "you never know what I would say if this success wasn't in front of me now." It seems the spotless tale of Drake's ascension has for years been piggybacking upon the work of other artists.

**OVO maintains the mirage that it is expanding Toronto's scene**

Yet, in May *The Globe and Mail* released an article praising Drake for his expansion of Toronto's music scene. The numerous points of contention seem to have been ignored, as the people of the 6ix continue to be enamored by the glory of Drake and his awe-inspiring presence. Perhaps this is endemic of the cultural divide within this city, as many reporters and promoters of Drake's Toronto remain blind to the struggles of lesser-known locals. All things considered, despite Drake's attempts to convince us otherwise, Toronto still remains largely too underdeveloped to produce a self-sufficient music scene capable of competing with Los Angeles or Atlanta. With Drake at the helm, OVO Sound has become the unofficial tastemaker of the city, making it nearly impossible for an independent artist to spring past its massive shadow. Toronto talent's can either travel to the United States and follow the path Drake embarked upon ten years ago or attempt an OVO co-sign and risk becoming an instrument of manipulation. Few have achieved success without passing through the gates of OVO Sound (or even by entering them), and as a result Toronto's musical growth has been significantly hindered. Yes, Drake appears on the popular OVO Radio on Apple Beats 1, during which he features local artists, but without consistent support and promotion, these artists and the city will continue to struggle. Now, in all fairness, one can appreciate the attention Drake has called to our wonderful city. However, it stands that the incredible story of the "6 God" may be just a little too good to be true, with many talented casualties littering his path to success.

# BIZZARH

*a conversation on how to craft new narratives*

words by melissa vincent
photography by yannis guibinga

As artists, Bizzarh are refreshingly challenging to categorize. Comprising Jaz Aminata (aka Blak Matilda) and Teoni Amore (aka Aqua), the Toronto-based soulquestrian rap duo follows an artistic lineage that ranges from the afrosurrealism of Sun Ra and Octavia Butler to the neo-soul revival established by Lauryn Hill and Erykah Badu. Bizzarh's music—draped in carefully selected cosmic influences —has led them to share a stage with Willow Smith, and rings of two artists that play only by rules that they have drawn themselves. It is an enticing alternative given the current musical landscape, which has called for an overhaul of traditional industry practices that mirrors the need for a similar transformation in political and social spheres.

In several ways, 2016 was the year that was dominated by the voices of women of colour proposing crucial and vibrant new narratives. Solange's *A Seat at the Table* nearly eclipsed her sister's call to arms and activism, while Princess Nokia retrofit a definition of "urban feminism" for both smart grrls and ghetto tings. Here in Toronto, Bizzarh's "shit is for us," and part of what makes Aminata and Amore's story so important to tell is that it that it feels both collective and intimate. In their own words, "we're two black girls from the hood," an affirmation of identity that resonates with anyone who has used their past to anchor their future. In sculpting a vision for a new musical paradigm, Aminata and Amore have developed a quasi-guidebook that pulls from their past and present while anticipating the future. It is unequivocally on their own terms.

> "Success to me is giving the green light to others."

## Redrawing the Boundaries

Growing up in the Black Creek neighborhood located near Jane and Lawrence, Aminata and Amore lived on the same block. As children, they made up dances; by their early teens, dancing had evolved into making music together. "I had a lot going on in my brain and I figured, why not rap," Aminata explains. They found comfort in discovering artists that offered alternatives to the narrow perception that all black female musicians needed to be vocal powerhouses. "Getting into artists like J*Davey and Erykah Badu was cool, like I can do this too and I don't have to be like your typical Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and Beyoncé kind of singer," Amore remembers. "Of course they're amazing, but it was the realization that I don't have to do that. It broke down certain boundaries for me and let me explore without having the expectations to sound a certain way."

Later on, they would swap music through MSN, developing at the same time a fascination for the real and imagined extraterrestrial forces around them as a means to further refine their sound. "We've always been into the surreal and there has always been an intangible force that came so fluidly to us," Aminata muses. "We tried to understand it outside of us and throughout the universe. We dabbled into occult, surrealism, Salvador Dali, astrology. It was important for us because we realized that there was another boundary we can surpass and we don't have to stick to the rules. We can rap about anything, even if you can't see it, you can feel it, and we can rap about it and the fact that you can bob your head while we're rapping about this thing that you can't see but you can feel is proof in itself."

## Locating Spaces to Grow

Trying to establish a foothold in any city is difficult and it can be especially challenging in Toronto, which lacks the creative infrastructure of other major urban centers like Los Angeles or New York. In a time when the shuttering of DIY spaces and the need for more systemic diversity often dominate the conversation about our local music ecosystem, Amore

and Amiata instead select to highlight the ways it is working for them. "There is an energy in the air in Toronto that breeds an optimism in meeting people and wanting to connect with others. I can have a group of friends with people from all walks of life and there's this feeling of, 'we're all newbies here trying to hit the ground running and just make it,'" Aminata describes. "It's important to know that there are so many beams of light in Toronto; there are more than a handful of these people. To have the opportunity to connect with them is inspiring for our character development."

For the duo, collaboration is a crucial part of both their artistic process and growth inside and outside the studio. "The most important part of collaborating is to allow the encounter to be completely organic," says Aminata. "We are vocal artists and rely on our voices as instruments and we create a vibe together over an instrumental. We work with creators who can give us a book so we can put a text in. When we connect with different creators we are essentially creating different books."

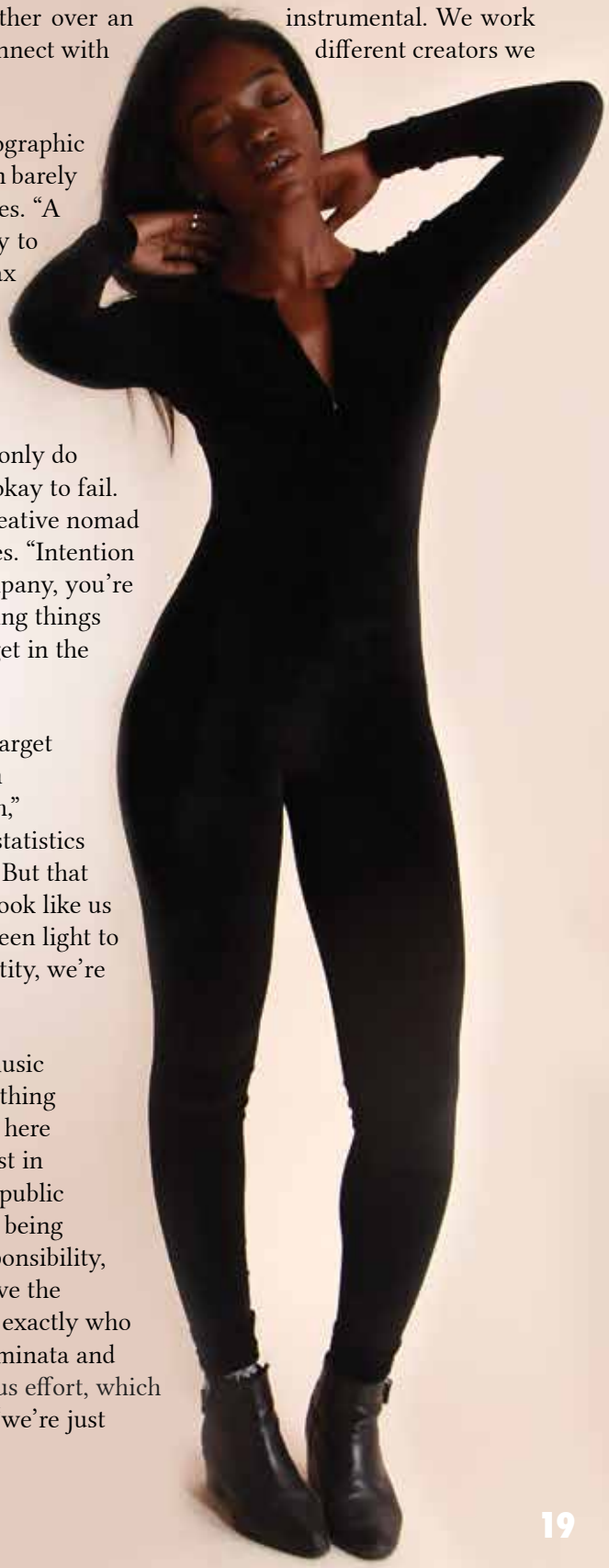
Both members admit that sometimes exploring every avenue requires a geographic shift. "The thing about Toronto is that you can work your ass off but you can barely feed Mom or pay off her mortgage and if you can it's rare," Aminata muses. "A lot of things are pulling us to L.A.," Amore continues. "But it's not as easy to find genuine people there because it's such a grind. No one's trying to relax and create, they're trying to grind and create income." "But we're always going to find a way. We're not privileged but we're hustlers at heart."

## Redefining (and Realigning) Success

According to Bizzarh, success can be measured through the ability to not only do things on their own terms but, more importantly, at their own pace. "It's okay to fail. It's okay to go back to work for a little bit and say I can't afford to be a creative nomad right now. I actually need to eat. I need to do these things," Aminata shares. "Intention is important. You're not trying to enslave yourself for someone else's company, you're just trying to make it work for yourself. I've learned my lesson about setting things in stone. Being patient is super important but also not letting your pride get in the way is super important."

An important part of Ami and Teoni's hard work involves envisioning a target for their success. "We've grown through developing our sound in addition to developing ourselves. Mutually, the end goal is intergenerational wealth," Aminata says. "We are young, black females raised by single moms. The statistics say that our chances of creating intergenerational wealth is little to none. But that little is also 100% and with that we're going to do a lot so little girls who look like us can look up and see us. That's the end goal. Success to me is giving the green light to others. Too many of us have the red light. If it takes being strong as an entity, we're gonna work on every avenue."

Ultimately for the two women, their end goal extends beyond changing music spaces; they have their sights set on the world. "Reclaiming space is something that I think should be an affirmation for black folks," Aminata states. "I'm here to reclaim space on an everyday notion. We don't have to explicitly protest in our music when we explicitly protest by going out in public, by making a public appearance, by sitting at the front of the subway and walking around and being black and being female and holding our heads high. Being visible is a responsibility, going out and holding our head high is a responsibility. As much as we love the underground, we can bring this black weirdness to the foreground and be exactly who we are for the sake of visibility." But like most rapidly rising artists, Jaz Aminata and Teoni Amore are still actively working towards their goals. It is a conscious effort, which they admit is a work in progress. "We can be lowkey," Amore concludes, "we're just kinda shy so we're working on being more visible."



# A Personal Essay about how institutions of music in Toronto have failed people of colour

Angelo Gio Mateo

I had an argument with a friend recently about whether indie music as a genre was "white music" in the same way that hip-hop was "black music." He argued that indie music was tied to white urban culture and is one of the few genres of music that did not develop as a bastardization of black music. By contrast, genres like hip-hop and jazz can historically be traced back to black culture and black social movements. We agreed to disagree.

A casual understanding of indie music might regard it as "white music," which excludes artists of colour and listeners from "indie music." While the indie music scene can debate within itself about its accepted definition, perhaps this assertion is due to the underlying (and ongoing) history of institutional racism within the industry that supports the genre. The name itself—which can be superficially be understood as music released independently or by an independent label—is not inherently tied to whiteness; hip-hop, electronic, and experimental classical music all have extensive histories of releasing independently. It is the institutions of the music industry—the radio stations, the music festivals, and the record labels—that have created and maintained this perception of not only *what* indie music is but *who* it is created for: young, white audiences.

It is not as if racialized bodies are not participating in indie music. There are countless indie musicians that identify as people of colour : Rostam Batmanglij from Vampire Weekend, Karen O from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Nancy Whang from LCD Soundsystem, Kele Okereke from Bloc Party, Santigold, FKA Twigs, and many others. Toronto-specific PoC artists include A Tribe Called Red, Shad, Ohbijou, Harrison, Yamantaka // Sonic Titan, Kaytranada, and Jazz Cartier.

Last year, when Noah Berlatsky of *The New Republic* published, "Why "Indie" Music Is So Unbearably White," his argument stemmed from the reality that people of colour are making indie music but yet somehow it is not being considered "indie." Instead it is being relegated to other genres. His central point hinges on what race signifies: "Genres like rock and indie are for many people defined by whiteness—that is, white skin becomes the genre marker, rather than the music itself."

The general conceptualizations of indie music have had difficulty opening up its traditional categories in order to include a more diverse range of artists who could be considered to embody an "indie spirit." Who can deny that Chance the Rapper is indie when he refuses to sign with a record label? Or that that Frank Ocean makes "indie music" that defies not only traditional R&B sonic qualities but tropes about black masculinity? Run the Jewels' political rap and refusal to play by the rules of the genre puts them firmly outside of the realm of mainstream hip-hop. All of Kanye West's albums following *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy (2010)* have sonic qualities that defy any concrete definition and embody the indie spirit through its sheer experimentation.

What matters then, are the institutional gatekeepers who get to decide how the categories of "indie music" are manifested and have the largest influence in crafting the perception of indie to both serious and casual listeners. And within this scene, a lack of diversity can be found in the prominent institutions of "indie music". Founded in 2013, Indie88 is arguably the most public face of indie music in the city of Toronto and has a significant following both on air and online. Indie88 was created with the following mission: to "uncover, discover and re-discover it first," and that "Popular. Obscure. Signed. Unsigned. We believe indie comes in all shapes and sizes." And yet, Indie88 has consistently failed to uphold these principles, especially when it comes to artists of colour. Of all of my hours spent driving around and listening to Indie88, the radio station often favours indie-rock/indie-folk bands like The Lumineers or Arkells. I have rarely, if ever, heard them play artists that identify as people of colour.

Additionally, despite the growing hip-hop music scene in Toronto, the city no longer has a broadcast home for the genre, and consequently, no home for indie hip-hop. The radio stations that once played hip-hop and R&B music in Toronto, such as MuchMusic's RapCity and Flow 93.5, have been cancelled. This leaves artists like Shad, Kaytranada, and Jazz Cartier in a more precarious position as indie hip-hop artists. Within the growing subsection of hip-hop where artists eschew the traditional big major labels and continue to push the genre's boundaries, it is glaringly apparent that any their music has failed to find a home.

This is especially troubling due to the fact that indie music benefits significantly from the contributions of artists of colour that enrich the genre by sharing personal and collective narratives that might not otherwise have a platform. When independent South Asian hip-hop group Swet Shop Boys released their 2016 album *Cashmere*, they addressed the reality of racial profiling after being stopped at the airport ("Shottin"). It's a poignant inclusion that not only affirms the experiences of their racialized fans but their place as fans of the genre. It drives home the point that fans of colour should be able to listen and feel a sense of ownership rather than alienation when listening to "indie" music; that it is inappropriate to consider it as a creation solely for white audiences. Indie music is not inherently white but if major cultural producers continue to prioritize the music of mostly white artists, it will reaffirm the opinion that indie is primarily for white people. If this continues, we risk being shut out of the conversation. On 2011's *Metal Meets*, Toronto indie band Ohbijou released a song entitled "Balikbayan," which in Tagalog—the Filipino language—means "one who returns home." It also refers to freight boxes full of goods that the members of the Filipino diaspora send back to their relatives in the Philippines. The band sings that these boxes carry home "the weight of a better life." It is a story that I relate to deeply as a Filipino immigrant who moved when I was three. It matters that people of colour are included in indie music because we all deserve to hear music that reflects who we are. What is the mission of indie institutions like Indie88 if they are not dedicating themselves to showcasing local music that tells the narratives of Canada's increasingly multicultural population, and airing music that reflects the diversity in their own city? By failing to provide a platform for artists of colour to showcase their talent, the institutions of music in Toronto will continue to obscure listeners who do not see themselves reflected in the music they showcase.

# THNKS FR TH MSGNY

## THROUGH BEING COOL: WHAT IS REALLY WRONG WITH EMO KIDS?

GRACE GUIMOND

The first page of results when you Google image search the word "emo": a selection of very enthusiastic eyeliner, gravity-defying reverse-mullets, and screengrabs pulled from a Wikihow article: "How to be Emo." The only music-related result is Black Veil Brides, an American glam metal band. Search "90s emo" instead and almost every result is an image of a band or from a show, without a selfie or makeup tutorial in sight (save for an August 2002 prototypical "Am I Emo?" infographic that ran in *Seventeen Magazine*). Mainstream success is often posited as the culprit for emo's spiral away from hardcore punk and into recycled 4chan material. However, the real reason that emo garnered such an intense amount of hate in the mid-2000s was not solely due to its mainstream popularity but rather its popularity within a much more contentious and complicated demographic: preteen and teenage girls.

Emo is a hard-to-define umbrella encompassing a variety of subgenres. First wave emo started in the late 1980s as a more emotionally-driven offshoot of the Washington hardcore punk scene, with bands like Rites of Spring pushing towards a more intensely introspective focus. Throughout the late 1980s to the early- and mid-1990s, second-wave emo remained fairly underground, building on the style of earlier emo bands in order to carve out a distinct niche within hardcore. The much-derided third wave of emo hit the mainstream in the early 2000s with poppy and radio-friendly bands like Jimmy Eat World, Brand New, and everything else on Much Music's *Big Shiny Tunes 5-10*, which brought with it the genre's universally pervasive "hate-to-love, love-to-hate attitude." Ten years post-commercial apex, emo is "cool" again, with newer bands being labelled as fourth-wave emo—though most bands falling under this umbrella reject the label—and drawing on mostly midwest emo for inspiration (a subset of emo music popularized in the mid-1990s and characterized by softer vocals and twinkly guitar).

Emo has consistently struggled with its positioning of female identities both in the content of its lyrics and within the scene itself. During the first and second wave (and later), lyrics often adopted a traditional Madonna / whore dichotomy wherein women are either overly-glorified through role-assigning pedestalization or demonized as "out-to-get-you sluts." Emo's mainstream debut, in the shape of its third wave, replicated this dichotomy more broadly through a misogynistic backlash that was quite different from other scenes' "it's mainstream so now it sucks" discourse. The real issue 1990s emo alumni had with the change in direction was that something that had once belonged to bros had since been "appropriated" by teenage girls and had undergone a process of perceived feminization. Call it the Twilight Effect: a pop culture phenomenon picked up by teen girls is automatically demoted to the lowest common denominator.

In the early 2000s, increased access to PCs and broadband internet offered teens and tweens greater accessibility than ever before to music scenes, as social media platforms like Myspace and Makeoutclub became crucial sites for introducing emo to newer, younger audiences. The shift did not go unnoticed. A combination of an auditory change where it "got soft" and a newly mainstream status is usually perceived by critics of third-wave emo as the cause of emo's mid-2000s 180° transformation. But emo music itself did not change that drastically, and mainstream attention does not warrant a universal label of disdain.

Most mid-2000s middle schoolers will remember "I Must Be Emo," the emo-diss track by glorified Juggalo's, Hollywood Undead, which reads more like a critique of the performance of hegemonic masculinity than a genre of music:

> Cause our dudes look like chicks, and our chicks look like dykes/
> Cause emo is one step below transvestite!…/
> If I said I like girls, I'd only be half right!…/
> I look like I'm dead and dress like a homo/ I must be emo.

Pathetic insults aside, the song exemplifies the most prevalent public perception of the mid-2000s emo scene: gay. It is an attitude that might be expected from middle schoolers but has also prevailed in more "academic" discussions surrounding emo music. In her essay "Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity in Crisis," Emily Ryall's argues that appropriations of femininity and homosexuality within the emo subculture serve heteronormative ends.

The argument that eyeliner-sporting Alternative Press heartthrobs like Pete Wentz and Gerard Way wear makeup because girls think it is hot is inherently misogynistic. Male celebrities wearing makeup sends a message to preteen girls—whose femininity is often simultaneously propped up and critiqued — that traditional performances of femininity are not inherently weak. Seeing their heroes wearing makeup while screaming on stage in front of thousands of fans is the stuff of inspirational dreams, not wet ones. Saying a masc musician performs femininity to serve heteronormative ends waters down girls' music taste to, essentially, "they like it because they're hot." It effectively reproduces the trope that teenage girls do not and can not like real music, which situated emo at the bottom of the pop culture hierarchy in the first place.

After a decade under the influence of peak-"cheer-up, emo kid" culture, a fourth wave of emo, albeit contentiously, has emerged. To an untrained eye, the crowds at 2016 emo shows are strikingly normcore, with Hot Topic aesthetics and MSN handles left behind in 2006. The new wave (and overwhelming abundance) of midwest college-boy emo bands have garnered attention from websites like Pitchfork, which was vehemently denied to the three previous waves of emo bands. My favourite tweet from the Twitter account @WashedUpEmo sums up this new open acceptance of emo music well, "Pitchfork 1999: It's an emo album, 2/10. Pitchfork 2016: Sounds like a 90s emo album, 9/10." However, while the word emo does not hold the same connotations as it did ten years ago, the stigma persists. A final piece of anecdotal evidence: there is a Facebook Toronto emo music group that was created by a teen girl as a way to reminisce about our favourite 2006 MTV jams. A male member of a somewhat well-known Toronto emo band stepped in with a song from a fairly blasé emo revival band captioned with, "everyone posting garbage 2003 mall rock needs to listen to this right now." The garbage mall rock in question? A harmless handful of Fall Out Boy songs.

# HAND OVER THE MICROPHONE

## Despite the rise of "safe spaces" in alternative music scenes, complete inclusivity is still a long way off.

*— Emma Kelly —*

Growing up near Los Angeles, my friends and I made regular pilgrimages to The Smell, an all-ages venue which had gestated local bands such as FIDLAR, No Age, Vivian Girls, Health, and Bleached. The energy of the crowd was so young, so hip, and so weird. Looking around, I saw mascs in dresses dancing alongside femmes with mustaches; everyone still had their Bernie Sanders pins on. It felt like at any moment the band playing on stage could swap their instruments with members of the audience selected at random and the show would not lose its momentum. We Growing up near Los Angeles, my friends and I made regular pilgrimages to The Smell, an all-ages venue which had gestated local bands such as FIDLAR, No Age, Vivian Girls, Health, and Bleached. The energy of the crowd was so young, so hip, and so weird. Looking around, I saw mascs in dresses dancing alongside femmes with mustaches; everyone still had their Bernie Sanders pins on. It felt like at any moment the band playing on stage could swap their instruments with members of the audience selected at random and the show would not lose its momentum. We were a united front fighting the good fight against misogyny, racism, homophobia, climate change, heteronormativity, capitalism, and any other form of oppression; in short, the social conditions of the world we had inherited.

Reflecting back on the experience, I was almost always surrounded by a sea of white faces. The Smell is located in downtown Los Angeles which is one of the most racially diverse areas in the entire city. It straddles the edge of infamous Skid Row where street involved folk camp out in nearly every nearby doorway or alley. I remember being with someone who praised the lack of gentrification and, in the same breath, vocalized their fear at being robbed walking around such a 'ghetto' place.

© Photo by Kiabad Meza

It is difficult to ignore the hypocrisy of this approach to safe and equitable music venues and a review of some of most high-profile attempts to ensure the accessibility of all venues highlights a crucial gap. In the last few years, several indie rock and punk bands have stepped up to create a space at their concerts where all can feel welcome. Several artists such as Joyce Manor, Ought, Code Orange, and Jeff Rosenstock have called out inappropriate audience behavior such as sexual harassment and overly aggressive moshing. Lauren Mayberry of Chvrches, Britty Drake of Pity Sex, and Brianna Collins of Tigers Jaw have all penned statements about the sexism and homophobia they have witnessed on tour and how it will not be tolerated.

Although these are all meaningful advancements, the careful reader will note that the artists above focus on counteracting primarily gendered inequalities in music spaces rather than intersectional ones. There is no acknowledgement of the barriers that both audience members and musicians may face during a performance due to their race, ability, sexuality or economic position. It forces the question of whose interests are worthy of being advocated for, or rather, who has a voice in the conversation and who does not.

The limited attempt to widen the range of participation in alternative music scenes is not a new phenomenon. In the 2013 documentary *The Punk Singer* there is a clip of Kathleen Hanna pausing in the middle of a 1991 Bikini Kill performance to urge "all girls to the front," a common practice for the band. She wants the women in the crowd to know their presence is not only acknowledged but prioritized. It is a big moment. While Hanna's role in the riot grrrl movement is often heralded as one of early attempts to open up the punk scene, her statement also reproduces a cisnormative environment while actively obscures other identities.

Recognizing some of the past and present shortfalls around the current state safe spaces opens up valid critique of how much progress has actually occurred in alternative music scenes. In a 2016 *Now Magazine* interview, Toronto singer-songwriter Lido Pimienta alluded to the reality she faces as a racialized artist. Pimienta explains that "White people have more access to venues and entertainment, and therefore the entertainment is going to reflect that power. In my work, I try to disrupt and change that narrative by taking up space." It is a statement that reinforces the need to take a variety of narratives into the equation when addressing the conversation around safe space.

So how do we move towards more intersectional, equitable approaches to safe spaces? The first step involves prioritizing the critiques made by queer artists of colour, like those made by Olympia's G.L.O.S.S. and Kayla Phillips of Bleed the Pigs, in order to recenter the intersectional identities in music spaces. It also might be helpful to take notes from collectives who have achieved success in mediating the nuances of accessible and welcoming spaces artis. Babely Shades, a collective based in Ottawa, have led activism in this area since their formation in 2015. Their mission statement reads: "Babely Shades was created out of the need for a safer space for feminine POCs within a small local music community, in which folks of colour & marginalized genders are often underrepresented and mistreated." Since then, they have changed the approach to music scenes by putting on their own shows, consistently featuring diverse artists like Everett and Above Top Secret. Earlier this year, Philadelphia's Modern Baseball announced that they had set up a help hotline in an effort to ensure the safety of those that shows, a dynamic approach to ensure fans have a place to seek support.

***"It forces the question of whose interests are worthy of being advocated for, or rather, who has a voice in the conversation and who does not."***

These examples are important interruptions and offer strategies for creating spaces that are more inclusive for all their participants. While there is no clear-cut or easy solution to creating safe spaces in music venues, participants should begin by questioning their position, privilege, and the physical accessibility of all the spaces they enter.

# COLE MENDEZ

## STUDENT MUSICIAN PROFILE

RACHEL EVANGELINE CHIONG

© Photo by Rachel Evangeline Chiong.

I sit on Cole's bedroom floor, waiting for him to finish taping a Beyoncé poster to the ceiling. I'm too shy to tell him to close his windows. The elephant tapestries above his mattress shiver in the brisk October air; his girlfriend's spider-plants shudder. As he sits down on the rug for the interview, I move the Earl Grey tea he made for me out of the way.

***"There was a long time where I thought I was going to go into sciences."***

The rational side had always been attractive to him, he says, and he read books to satiate his curiosity. But Grade 11 Math was not as kind, so he switched his focus to music. It was not an issue, Cole shrugs; music had always been simmering in the background. He started playing violin at three. At eight, Cole ignored comments about his hands being too small and began learning the piano. It has been his main instrument ever since.

***"I play some rock, produce electronic music, and...play jazz."***

Grant Ulysses, an indie-rock gem, and Casual Closure, an electronic hip-hop experience, are both solo projects. As he taps the hardwood, Cole explains that Grant Ulysses the live band is itself separate from the "studio" project. The band only interprets select songs into a live setting—other tracks depend on carefully placed layers to create soundscapes, for a different listening experience. Casual Closure stems from a Grade 9 love for electronic music. The interest has evolved along with Cole, dipping into vaporwave, scooping up gigabytes of disco and jazz, and, these days, adding trap to its eclectic repertoire.

Solarflannel is a trio with Matthew Fantini on bass and Jon Catanus on drums. They are still under wraps for the moment but, Cole chuckles, it is his Twitter handle so it is technically official. They are looking forward to cooking up originals with a neo-soul hip-hop fusion, as well as covering the likes of Kendrick Lamar and Anderson Paak.

***"Any time you're spending working towards improving your musicianship is time well spent."***

As a student, the next three years of his life are basically planned out. He likes to think of this time as a portion of his lifetime dedicated to studying. Of course, he concedes, spreading his arms apart in shrug, there is always the gnawing guilt: that the time spent working on Grant Ulysses should have been spent practicing jazz standards, and vice versa, when he's holed up in a music room and he has not done anything Solarflannel-related in a while. But regardless, Cole muses, practicing benefits all parts of musicianship. Striking that balance between studying music and engaging with the music scene is the real challenge.

***"A lot of artists have that pretty consistent drive to 'not suck.'"***

There are so many things to do and barely any time; Cole shakes his head. The quality of his music, he believes, has not reached a professional standard yet. The anticipation of always improving is his constant inspiration, motivating him to create both through his personal projects and at school.

Nearing the end of the interview, I ask him what his ideal, perfect day would look like. The whites of his eyes flicker as he looks up, thinking.

***"Most days are perfect days for me…"***

The musician entrepreneur and genius looks down at the rug and smiles.

***"...everyday that I learn something is a good day."***

# BEING SOUTH ASIAN IS A BLESSING

## A list of South Asian musicians who have made significant splashes both in the music industry and in my life.

Dayapartap "Daven" Boparai

It was not until high school that I began to discover my own musical taste, starting with the charming echoes of folk and the whirring guitar riffs of alternative rock. As I jumped from genre to genre, I noticed that no one that I listened to was South Asian. As one of the only brown kids in my whole school, I had always felt a pressure to retain my ancestral culture. I did not want to be that Indian kid who never listened to Indian music, or to be considered a "whitewashed" Indian in America. I remember looking through my library of music and realizing that the only songs with a Desi or South Asian connection were The Beatles' "Within You Without You" and that Jay Z remix of Panjabi MC's "Beware Of The Boys." Although I could have jumped into traditional genres to fill the void, I wanted someone I could relate to in English. It was not until I discovered Das Racist—an alternative rap collective—that I found a voice I could connect closely with in South Asian rapper Himanshu Suri.

Listening to South Asian artists made me realize that music was another way for me to connect to my culture. I never thought I would hear raps about *Kali Pani*, an old Bollywood film, or post-9/11 racism, or hear tablas pitter-patter on a song's intro—something I would only hear in classical Indian music or Sikh prayers. It was refreshing to listen to lyrics that I could directly relate to and hear new but somewhat familiar sounds. These artists helped give me the confidence to appreciate the fact that I was South Asian, and realize that it was a blessing. To celebrate that realization, I have put together a list of South Asian artists that I think everyone should check out:

### Who are the Paul Brothers (Jai Paul/A.K. Paul)?

Hailing from London's Rayners Lane, Jai Paul and Anup Kumar Paul have redefined both electronic and pop music with their unique 21st century sound. It all started in 2010 when Jai Paul released "BTSTU (demo)." The song quickly garnered attention—including from Drake and Beyoncé, both of whom sampled it—for its glitchy synth beat and affectionately distinct vocal harmonies. In 2013, a sixteen-track LP surfaced on Jai's Bandcamp before being denounced as a leak; a leak whose *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter* samples and catchy synth beats would later earn it a spot on Pitchfork's "The 100 Best Albums of the Decade So Far (2010-2014)." Meanwhile, A.K. Paul has produced for the UK singer Nao and recently released his solo single, "Landcruising." Although we have not seen much from these two, the content we have seen is enough to bow down, pay respects, and hope for more.

**Essential Tracks:** Jai Paul—"BTSTU (edit)," A.K. Paul—"Landcruising"

### Who is M.I.A.?

Mathangi Arulpragasam, better known as M.I.A., is possibly the most prominent South Asian/Sri Lankan artist of our generation. She is a singer-songwriter, a producer, a fashion designer, a model, and an activist, and has been praised for her originality and creativity. Basically, M.I.A. does it all. Her music blends reggae, electronic beats, hip-hop, and Tamil film music, among other genres, into densely layered tracks that have the listener itching for more. Her charismatic voice is so icy that she could single-handedly reverse the melting of the glaciers. At 41, MIA is still as cool as ever, proving to everyone that no one in the corner has swagger like her.

**Essential Tracks:** MIA—"Paper Planes," "Bad Girls," "Jimmy"

### Who is Nav?

This is the question everyone has been asking after hearing his verse on Travis Scott's "Biebs In The Trap." Nav, or Navraj Goraya, is an up-and-coming Toronto rapper/singer/producer who's been recognized by the likes of Metro Boomin and members of XO and October's Very Own. As of October 2016, there is almost nothing but the music—a few tracks on Soundcloud under the name BeatsByNav. His mysterious demeanor is akin to The Weeknd's emergence. Like The Weeknd, Nav's production encapsulates the listener in a hazy, Sin City atmosphere; hard-hitting 808s are perfectly paired with his laid-back Greater Toronto Area accent and catchy choruses about lean, girls, and Range Rovers. Mainstream success appears imminent for this young Rexdale artist, and soon maybe you too will be singing about your love for "LA-A-A-uh."

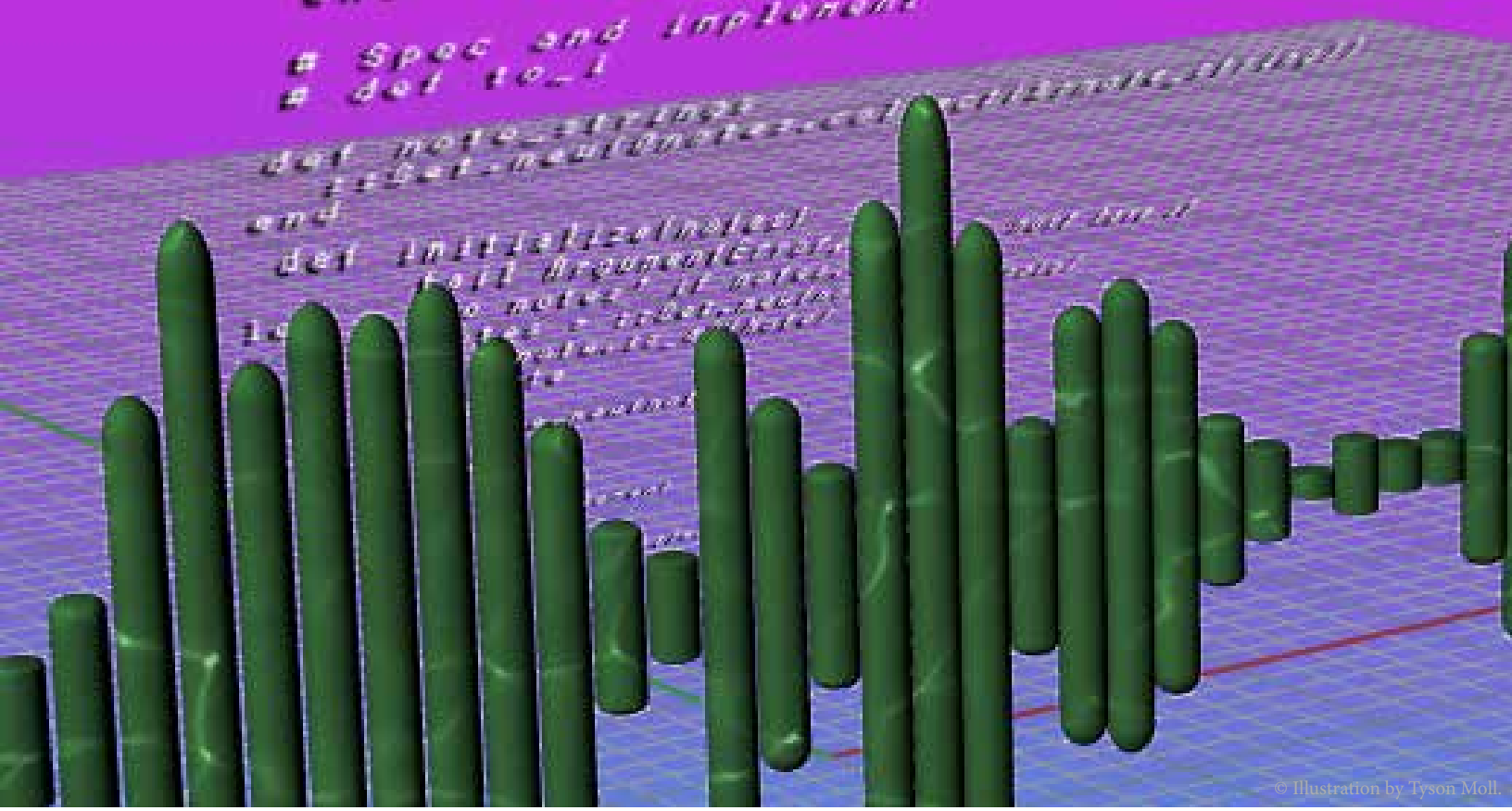
**Essential Tracks:** Nav—"Fell In Love," "Up," Travis Scott—"Biebs In The Trap"

### Who is Himanshu Suri?

Himanshu Kumar Suri—better known as "Heems"—is a Punjabi-Indian rapper hailing from Queens, New York, and a member of both Das Racist, with Victor Vasquez and Ashok Kondabolu, and Swet Shop Boys with Riz Ahmed. Heems pairs witty lines and outlandish rhyme schemes with an "I don't give a fuck" flow and Bollywood-sampling beats, delivering a powerful punch every time he steps up to the mic. His lyrical content varies wildly, from gloating and joking to reflecting on his experiences in a post-9/11 New York. He is also always working—he just released the Swet Shop Boys' album *Cashmere*, and new music and a possible FOX sitcom are in the works.

**Essential Tracks:** Das Racist—"Rapping 2 U," Heems—"Flag Shopping"

**Other artists to check out:**
Abhi//Dijon—"Ignore"
Vijay Iyer—"Human Promises"
Big Baby Gandhi—"Been A Villain"




# CODE GENERATION

A look into the use of live computer programming as an improvisational music composition method.

SHAQUILLA SINGH

You have likely been to a club where a DJ performed from behind a laptop screen. Now imagine their screen being projected for all to see, with them typing away at the keyboard—modifying lines of code that change what you hear in real time. Live coding is a performance art in which performers write code designed to make sound in front of an audience. To get started, all you really need is a computer and some technical know-how, making it a relatively accessible means of music production. A global network of live coders has emerged thanks to the internet, which has enabled the spread of individual programmer's tools and methods. Today, these artists are using live coding in order to push the boundaries of music making and performance art.

Computers have long been used to create music. The specific act of programming computers to produce sounds emerged as early as the 1950s. Live programming in particular is the result of advances in computing power during the 1970s that enabled real-time sound synthesis. Once computer hardware became fast enough to enable real-time processing, software developers rose to the occasion and created or modified tools to take advantage of this newfound power. These tools were then used by a group of internationally-based computer artists starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1985, Amsterdam's Studio For Electro-Instrumental Music (STEIM) hosted one of the earliest documented live coded performances. The live coding community spread with the continued advances in computing. Computers have become more pervasive and

powerful, new high-level software languages has made programming easier, and the internet has given us a way to connect with people around the world.

Today, live coding is a growing but still fairly underground music scene. Organizations such as TOPLAP, "whose acronym has a number of interpretations, one being the Temporary Organisation for the Proliferation for Live Algorithm Programming" (according to a Runme.org article by Amy Alexander and company), and Algorave organize festivals, concerts, and even academic conferences focused on the art of live coding. Toronto's own Vector Festival featured several live coders this past summer. A forthcoming publication, *Live Coding—A User's Manual,* aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to the practice as well as a closer look at its potential cultural implications. This past October, McMaster University hosted the International Conference on Live Coding, which offered academic talks and panels during the day and live coding performances and algoraves at night. Electronic musician Holly Herndon has also experimented with live programming tools and in 2012 told Dummy Mag that "[the tools are] still stuck in the world of academia, but I think that it's changing."

As the network of computational artists has progressed, they have begun to focus on spreading the artform and welcoming newcomers. Algorave has defined live coded music as "sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive conditionals." TOPLAP maintains a wiki that collects information related to live coding, such as academic papers, a rough curriculum for getting started, a list of recommended software, and selection of article and video profiles, as well as a Slack chat group for communication amongst artists. It also has its own manifesto, in which it demands "...access to the performer's mind, to the whole human instrument. [...]Show us your screens," and says "Programs are instruments that can change themselves. [...] Algorithms are thoughts." These definitions set the stage for performers to join with others doing similar work and talk about its methodology, meaning, and potential uses under a clearly defined concept.

Live coding is not just about using code in an unconventional way; it brings with it unique creative advantages. It allows the artist to create or manipulate software-based models of instruments, often in ways that would not be possible with physical instruments. Electronic music production software such as Ableton or Logic support similar digital instruments, but their graphical user interfaces create abstracted versions of already abstract models or instruments, which can cause loss of meaning and limit what the artist can do. Programming is a more direct way to tell a computer what to do, giving the artist a bigger and more powerful vocabulary with which to work, and in a sense converse with a machine—though it does have a steeper learning curve. Most live coding libraries and languages come with built-in software instruments that can be used with complete, automatic precision. Adjusting pitch, speed, softness, or any other property of a series of notes becomes simple. This allows for the creation of complex, precise, orchestral-sounding pieces that would otherwise be difficult or even impossible for humans to play. Modifying premade software models of instruments or creating entirely new ones expands the field of possible sound combinations even farther.

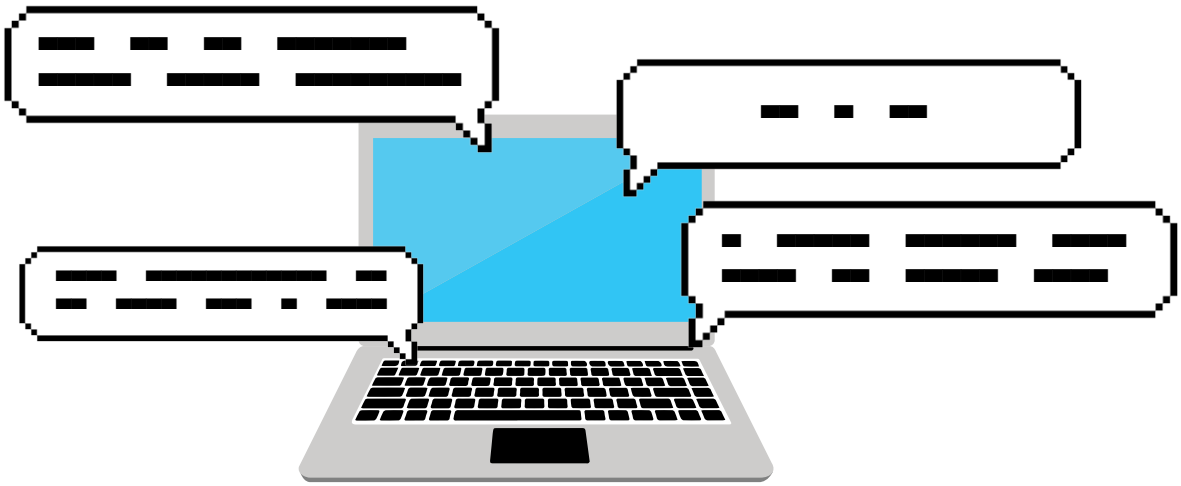
Another unique aspect of live programming is that it allows for multiple sources of input, making it possible for the composer to be only one of several things influencing the behaviour of a program. A live programmer can write their code so that it takes input from sensors and uses that information to self modify. This creates new feedback loops in addition to the ones inherent to performance. In a performance called *Code LiveCode Live*, Marije Baalman uses the sounds of her typing as input. The sounds are then modulated again by data from sensors in her laptop (the accelerometer, touchpad, camera, etc.) as well as the processes of the code itself (the memory and cpu usage); creating a program that behaves exactly as intended, but also in unpredictable ways not entirely within her control. The music output by the program is heard and interpreted by the programmer and the audience, and both reactions then influence the programmer's real-time modification of the self-modifying program, creating a looping monstrosity of sound.

Live coding is a growing, experimental method of electronic music production. The unique ways in which a given language or library may represent a series of musical notes or time give rise to a new form of musical notation meant for a computer's interpretation, instead of a person's. Live coded composition is a performative exercise in music-making that results in electronic music pushing the boundaries of the conventional conceptions of artists, programmers, and music itself.

# CRITIQUING THE SPACES OF CRITICISM IN MUSIC

## predicting the future for musicians and music journalism in a new cultural era

**Paul Ciurea**



© Illustration by Shaquilla Singh and Yasmine El Sanyoura.

In the past decade, hyper-connected millennial music-lovers have harnessed the capacity of the internet to redefine two previously immutable areas of the music industry: music journalism and the sharing of new music. While music streaming services and communities like Bandcamp or Soundcloud have given artists a new platform for independently releasing their work, several online music publications such as Pitchfork, The Quietus, and Stereogum have become crucial sources for unearthing and introducing independent music to the mainstream public. Although these two contemporary platforms originated alongside each other, they have also brought a host of age-old tensions back to the forefront. Despite the historically strained relationship between the journalist and the musician, it has arguably become more pronounced in the internet age. It begs the question of how to improve the rapport between the critical music journalism and its subject matter so they can exist in harmony? Perhaps an analysis of integrity on both sides warrants discussion and a resolution lies in finding a happy medium between both the artist and the journalist.

In developing a foundation for examining conflicts between artistic merit and writers who critique them, few examples are as infamous as Sonic Youth's very public quarrel with *The Village Voice*. Following a less-than-stellar review of one of their live performances from the early 80s, the band promptly offered a retaliation of sorts in the song/EP entitled "Kill Yr Idols", aimed squarely at music critic Robert Christgau. Following the debacle, they vehemently swore against the notion of impressing the media and conforming to the limitations imposed by mainstream audiences. While displaying an element of what one may consider artistic integrity, the aforementioned example foregrounds the potential of pretension on the artists' side. A knee-jerk reaction to the way one's

controversial art is perceived lacks a crucial sense of self-awareness. It is unreasonable to expect that a piece of art—particularly music, which is *meant* to reach out to people—should be treated as an infallible work of representation or expression. Although the band may have simply been advocating for their art, it can also open our eyes to an inherent arrogance on behalf of the musician. It is important for musicians to realize that upholding artistic integrity also means allowing one's creation to stand on its own and letting it face exposure regardless of the response it receives from outside media.

“When valuable and critical journalism compromises its integrity, important envelope-pushing artists lose their visibility.”

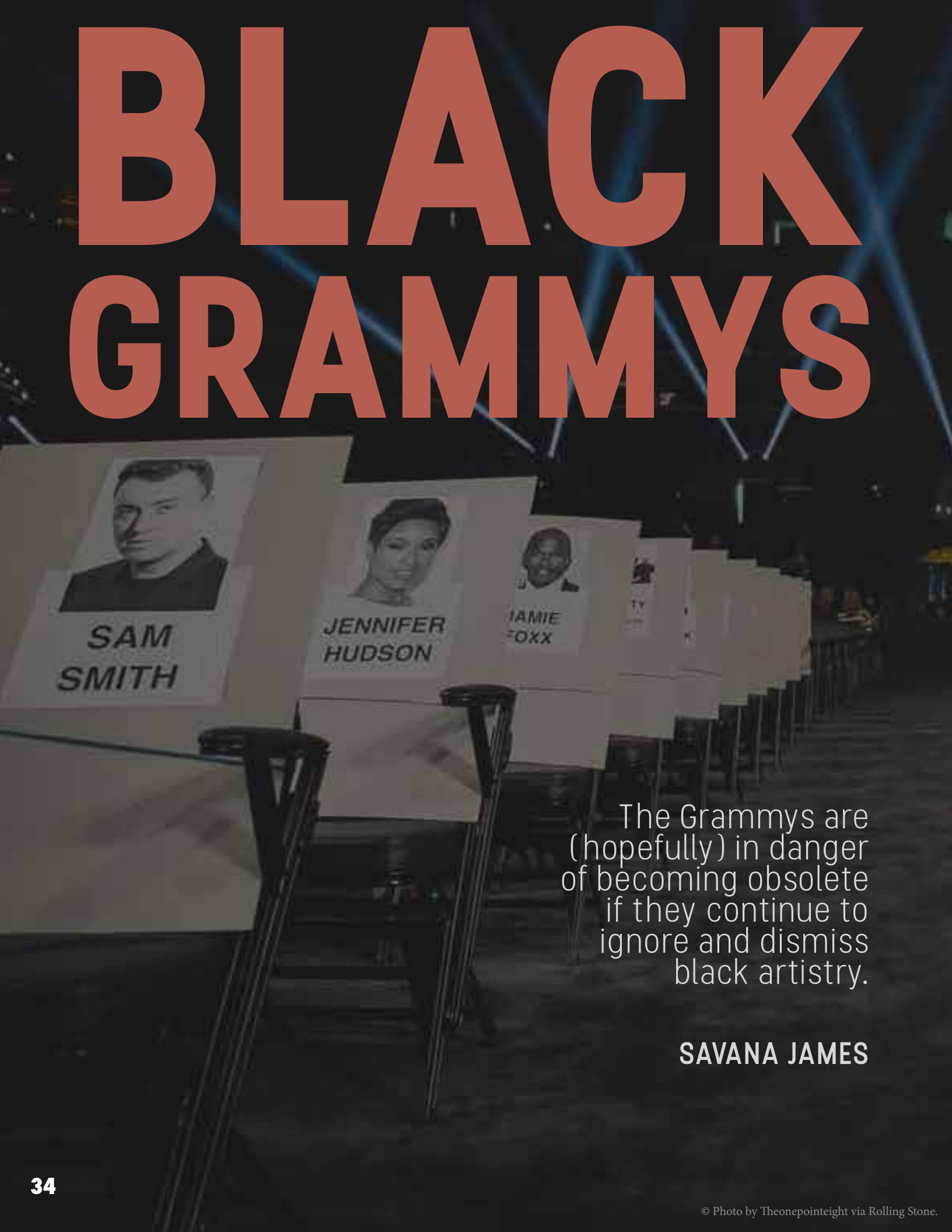
This notion of acting on the basis of integrity might be primarily personal for the artist; journalists and the field of journalism at large are responsible for upholding the identity (and integrity) of the establishment they are contributing to which may exert a great deal of influence on their work. In October of 2015, Pitchfork Media was purchased by mass media company Condé Nast (a publisher that also owns *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and many other popular magazines). In a *New York Times* interview following the acquisition, Condé Nast's chief digital officer, Fred Santarpia, stated that Pitchfork would bring "a very passionate audience of millennial males into [the Condé Nast] roster." Pitchfork released a statement on the day of the acquisition assuring its readers of the integrity of its editorial voice and opinions; that Condé Nast shares "every aspect of [Pitchfork's] focus," and that it will "remain true to the ideals that have made it the most trusted voice in music." Despite these claims, it remains impossible to ignore the way that corporate interest compromises the integrity of journalism, which has resulted in a blurring of the lines between journalism and marketing. Under sizeable bureaucratic influence, it is possible for music journalism to lose its impassioned, critical voice. Looking at the rise in music-related targeted advertisements on Pitchfork, it becomes difficult to trust in Pitchfork's claims of music integrity when it has fallen into the arms of a business that shapes popular culture consumerism through media influence.

When valuable and critical journalism compromises its integrity, important envelope-pushing artists lose their visibility. Truly independent sources of journalism do not have the same agenda as larger corporate platforms and will often assume the role of upholding a sense of honesty that works in tandem with the art, as opposed to selling it. Although more modest, they have the freedom to be uncompromising, honest voices within a community; responsible and forward about what is published, and mediated not by bureaucratic influence, but rather by the ethos of the community it belongs to. In an ideal world, this would be the epitome of journalistic integrity.

Between the value of integrity and degree of 'rightness' or 'wrongness', there is no objective answer. While the notion of this particular type of integrity—one that holds both artists and critics to equal standards in itself is abstract; it is an important phenomenon to discuss that is driven by a common desire of creative expression in both the format of music journalism or the music making itself. These two influential mediums have the capacity to create cohesion and a sense of community, which is one of the ways in which music scenes *work* as social and cultural spaces. Active and engaged curatorial methods such as those of Chicago's own Bitchpork festival—an independent and musician-run indie festival formerly existing within the city's DIY scene—show us that it is possible to create spaces for music to thrive without sacrificing integrity as a consequence. Although fleeting, as Bitchpork only lasted for 4 years, it gave opportunities to artists unable to play shows due to the annual Pitchfork Music Festival. It was an opportunity for Chicago DIY musicians and freelance/indie journalists to connect and for the artistic space to progress due to a common mindset and determination.

In reconciling both of these aspects, it becomes possible to revitalize and further actualize the potential that music has as a cultural and artistic force. A vibrant and thriving music scene is fluid—writers blend into the audience and musicians often write about the music surrounding them. Regardless of the medium, music scenes are dynamic spaces with moving parts. Their capacity to to create cohesion and a sense of community is everyone's responsibility to uphold.

# BLACK GRAMMYS




The Grammys are (hopefully) in danger of becoming obsolete if they continue to ignore and dismiss black artistry.

SAVANA JAMES



© Photo by Theonepointeight via Rolling Stone.

Kanye West is once again protesting the award show machine, announcing back in 2016 that if Frank Ocean's sophomore album *Blond(e)* was not nominated for a Grammy, West would boycott the show. While at first the move might sound conceited—is West threatening a boycott because he believes that only he can decide which albums are worthy of a nomination?—the truth is that black artists boycotting the Grammys is not a new phenomenon, and for good reason. When it comes to music's most prestigious awards, black artists seem to disproportionately lose. Mr. West himself is no stranger to remonstrating the award show circuit. Who can forget his infamous defence of Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" music video after it lost to Taylor Swift at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards? For all his faults, West is one of the most vocal black celebrities when it comes to defending uncelebrated black artists. His stance is iconic, and unfortunately necessary.

It is surprising (or perhaps unsurprising) to learn that the Grammys, music's most prestigious award, did not consider rap a viable genre until the late 1980s. The first rap Grammy, for "Best Rap Performance," was awarded in 1989 to The Fresh Prince (Will Smith) and DJ Jazzy Jeff for their track, "Parents Just Don't Understand." While some saw the new award as a move towards a more inclusive and diverse ceremony, it did not play out that way. Although the Grammys had finally introduced the award, they refused to televise its presentation. In reaction to the category not making the cut, Smith and DJ Jazzy Jeff boycotted the show, as did fellow nominees LL Cool J and Salt-n-Peppa. Smith described the lack of air-time as a "slap in the face," and Salt-n-Peppa famously said of the Grammys: "If they don't want us, we don't want them."

This rejection of the Grammy's claim to objectivity has remained relevant to black artists primarily because the Grammys have shown little interest in acknowledging black genius. Nearly half of the "Best Rap Album" category have been awarded to white rappers. Macklemore (one, in 2014) has more "Best Rap Album" wins than 2Pac, The Notorious B.I.G., Rakim, Snoop Dogg, and Nas combined, and has as many wins as Jay Z (1999), Kendrick Lamar (2016), and Puff Daddy (1998). Eminem has six wins. Something is clearly wrong. Moreover, the non-rap-specific categories appear biased as well; since 1989, only twelve black rappers have received nominations in the "Album of the Year" category and only eight black artists have won. Things have not improved that much either. In 2015, not a single rap-specific Grammy was awarded during the televised portion of the ceremony. As Canadian rapper Cadence Weapon wrote for *Now* that year, "The Grammys have done anything they possibly could to avoid the relevant sound of black music that currently has a stranglehold on the Billboard charts."

*This rejection of the Grammys' claim to objectivity has remained relevant to black artists primarily because the Grammys have shown little interest in acknowledging black genius.*

Not all black artists are, like Kanye, trying to fight for a place within the system. Instead, many have criticized the Grammys' worth entirely. Jay Z boycotted the show for years, telling MTV in 2002 that the Grammys were not giving "the rightful respect to hip-hop." The late Phife Dawg of A Tribe Called Quest rapped,"I never let a statue tell me tell me how nice I am," on 1993's "Award Tour." West Coast legend Kurupt agreed, declaring, "I don't need the white folks / I get ghetto Grammys" on 2010's "Yessir." Many artists agree that if the Grammys are not concerned with acknowledging the accomplishments of black artists, then perhaps black artists should not be concerned with winning Grammys. Frank Ocean, himself a Grammy winner, has expressed concern regarding his relationship to the award show. When asked about his potential nomination for *Blond(e)*, Ocean expressed why he was also going to boycott the event. He told the *New York Times* that, despite winning two of the awards in 2013, the ceremony "doesn't seem to be representing very well for people who come from where I come from." Ocean stated that he would rather fight the system with a "Colin Kaepernick"-style moment than be forced to sit in the audience.

The Kaepernick comment in particular is telling, noting as it does the larger systemic problem. The Grammys are not the only platform where black people have to fight a little harder than their white counterparts for recognition or where they are forced to constantly struggle with how to navigate these systemic issues (do you remember last year's trending topic, #OscarsSoWhite?). Unfortunately, many of the artists whoTwish to protest these shows are forced to boycott. There is an ever growing list of black musicians who miss out on well-deserved Grammy nominations and wins because protest and resistance seems be one of the only way real ways to criticize the inequality. In this system, black musicians are obligated to get loud like Kanye or step back like Ocean, or both. Either way, a certain degree of protest and labour is unfairly forced upon them.

New approaches have to be made when we consider the value placed on award ceremonies like the Grammys. Does Bob Marley's failure to win a single Grammy make his music any less impactful? Does Beck's win over Beyoncé for "Album of the Year" in 2015 make Beyoncé's album any less worthy of praise? Of course not. But what can we do with the systems that continually fail to recognize these instances of black accomplishment? Should the Grammys, considering the bias they have shown, continue to claim any kind of objectivity in judging the year's best work in music? For some, clearly the answer has been yes, but for many other artists, the answer is unclear. Artists and fans alike need to continually question the systems and awards they utilize to place value on the art they love and create. We all need to keep asking ourselves: why do we want a Grammy, anyway?

# WEATHERING THE MODERN TYPHOON

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MUSIC IN THE MODERN WORLD?

YIQI LUO (BETTY)

Since the early 20th century, traditional Chinese culture has undergone a series of changes, some characterized as Westernization, others due to the efforts of cultural preservation. Westernization dates back to the mid-19th century when Western ships crashed through the gate of the Chinese Qing Dynasty, marking the end of the last Chinese empire in history. Chinese thinkers began to re-examine Chinese culture, re-evaluating the role of traditional culture in relation to their newly embraced Western standards. During the Opera Reform Movement and the New Culture Movement from the 1900s to the 1920s, Chinese thinkers compared Chinese operas to Western operas, trying to reclassify the traditional genres according to the Western system and hotly debating whether or not they should abandon the traditional system altogether. This effort not only established a new perception of traditional Chinese music, but also marked the beginning of its accommodation to modern life.

In the contemporary period, traditional Chinese music and instruments have undergone constant tinkering. In order to express the ideology of modern Chinese life, both the government and Chinese citizens are modifying the content and the style of traditional music. For example, new pieces about the Chinese Communist Revolution and the overthrow of the capitalist government are being made in the style of traditional operas, but these new works differ from the old ones not only in their content but also in their mode of expression. The traditional opera's complex, symbolic makeup has been largely simplified, and the language and costumes have been modernized. Although the new works are quite different from the older ones—which are usually ancient storytelling and are largely based on the implication of colours, costumes, and movements—they

are also much more accessible to modern audiences.

Modifications have also been made to traditional Chinese instruments. Several string instruments, like the Guzheng, the Er'hu, and the Pipa, have seen structural and material changes. For example, more strings were added to the Guzheng—an instrument with over 2000 years of history—and the strings themselves are now fashioned out of metal or nylon instead of silk. These changes allow the instrument to be louder and more emotionally explicit, contributing to major changes in playing style. Guzheng pieces are traditionally very slow, quiet, and are usually plucked with one hand, but the music piece "Fighting the Typhoon," composed in the 1960s, brought both hands into direct use, increasing the intensity of the work and revolutionizing what is possible on the instrument.

In addition to modifying traditional music, modern musicians integrate traditional musical elements into popular songs. Chinese lyrics and poetic elements have been inserted into a variety of Western genres like pop, rock, hip-hop, and even metal. A well-known example is the Taiwanese singer Jay Chou, who worked with lyricist Vincent Fang to compose a fusion genre of Chinese popular music. They were remarkably talented at integrating poetic Chinese lyrics into Western music styles, and these "half-poem" songs were extremely successful in both the Chinese and International music markets. One special innovation that Jay Chou's music made is to use traditional Chinese instrument as a separate section in his songs, and this innovation inspired other modern musicians to integrate traditional opera as a distinct part of their songs. This type of integration created a fascinating musical style, drawing the attention of many traditional music lovers.

It is certainly great that the renovation of traditional music is drawing audiences and integrating modern styles, but it cannot be denied that a sometimes superficial, Westernized modern pop culture is still problematic in some ways for traditional music. The changes have successfully drawn new artistic appreciation, but frequently without any effort to learn about the deeper cultural representation of these styles. A personal example: when I was recording a Guzheng album, my parents strongly suggested that I should play the newer, more popular styles, like Jay Chou's melodies, so that the CD would be more interesting to potential audiences. Then, when I was organizing the order of the pieces, I was told to put the modern, faster pieces first so that the audientce would not get bored. I accepted the suggestions, but the reasons made me question the stranglehold newer styles have on traditional music.

The worry is that traditional Chinese music is accommodating too much. The contemporary use of traditional music is largely based within the popular framework, and its thoughtful beauty is struggling to coexist with newer styles, in many cases becoming subservient to the electronic beat of contemporary Pop. Similarly, traditional musical elements in popular songs are losing their cultural richness. Traditional music's historical and ideological engagement with themes such as integrity, honesty, loyalty, and the appraisal of great historical figures has been replaced almost exclusively by a focus on romantic love. For modern citizens, traditional music is becoming a fascinating ornamentation technique without any deeper meaning. What were once rich musical representations of ancient Chinese ideologies have become merely stylistic artifacts.

... SUPERFICIAL, WESTERNIZED MODERN POP CULTURE IS STILL PROBLEMATIC IN SOME WAYS FOR TRADITIONAL MUSIC.

Yet, what is happening to music styles that have not been exposed to modern changes? With a wider range of options available to them, people seem to be choosing "Fighting the Typhoon's" storytelling and complex playing techniques over the nostalgia of the 1700-year-old Hakka masterpiece, "Night Rain on the Tsiau-Leafed Window." Young people are obsessed with Chinese-style popular songs but cannot name the five great genres of classic opera. Although people are exposed to a combination of modern and traditional music, their appreciation for and understanding of traditional ideologies do not seem to be increasing. For instance, the spiritual representation of Guqin, an ancient Chinese instrument with over 3000 years of history, is almost unknown to young generations due to its inability to adjust to more upbeat sounds. Although the Guqin is at the core of the Chinese musical tradition, crystallizing collective understanding of musical communication through the distinct meaning of each string and playing style, it is being left behind, perhaps in deference to public taste. Sadly, according to a CCTV public service advertisement, there are only seven expert Guqin craftsmen left in China.

However, where should we direct this accusation? Young generations have the freedom to choose which culture they follow and it is totally reasonable for them to live with a modern ideology, pursuing the materialistic present world instead of the utopian traditional beliefs that inform Chinese traditional music. Should traditional music be blamed for not keeping up with the times and the influx of Western ideology? That does not seem correct either—it is part of the heart of Chinese civilization, and its unique collective history of morality, philosophical thought, and religious belief is worth preserving. It is not traditional music's responsibility to change and accommodate to modern people's values either. This is the dilemma; traditional music needs change in order to survive, while modern people need traditional music in order to better understand their history and where they come from. A balance of both might be the only way for traditional music to weather the surge of the "modern typhoon" and move towards a promising future.



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# BOY BETTER KNOW ABOUT GRIME

## THE GENRE AND LIFESTYLE KNOWN AS GRIME HAS FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN EMERGING FROM THE BRITISH UNDERGROUND

**BY SAMANTHA CAPALDI**

The evolution of grime has come full circle in the UK; however, here in North America we are hearing it for the first time.

Grime is more than a genre; rather, a movement, born out of a self-contained London street music scene that blends genres like dancehall, reggae, and especially UK garage, a distinctive late-1990s electronic genre somewhat similar to American house music. Although grime shares many similarities with hip-hop, it is anything but, with a unique bass-heavy sound. Grime is also unique in its method of freestyle rapping, which relies heavily on the repetition of key phrases tied to its personal zeitgeist, such as references and responses to grime performances heard on a popular radio show hosted by the English DJ Tim Westwood. Grime as a movement is specific to London street culture, including its own unique lifestyle with distinct fashions, sounds, regional slang, and, well, postcodes. Despite the regionalism, it is also a lifestyle that has begun to finally, unapologetically break in North America, mainly through BBK—that is Boy Better Know. BBK is a popular slang term within the grime genre. It stands for a record label run by the famous MC Skepta, as well as a kind of hashtag manifesto used to remind you what you should know about Skepta and his crew, and about grime itself.

Grime's roots run deep within the underground London UK garage scene of the early 2000s. There, the electronic UK garage sound was adopted and stylized by the likes of Wiley and Dizzee Rascal, some of grime's first MCs. In those days—and for most of the following decade—grime music was only broadcast on pirate radio stations. Any chance of seeing a live show depended on the time—generally the early hours of the morning—and your location, which needed to be within travelling distance of one of the underground, word-of-mouth raves.

Fast forward to 2016: thanks to the work of trailblazers like Wiley, Dizzee Rascal, Skepta, and his brother JME, grime music is still being broadcast, only this time on high-traffic online streams such as Apple Music's OVO Sound Radio show.

Despite the recent rise in North American interest, however, grime's struggle for recognition is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the genre had already come full circle all before ever really reaching North American audiences. During the late 2000s, grime abandoned the pirate stations and headed into the mainstream in search of a crossover. Dizzee Rascal, for instance, spent years seeking popular success, including a single with a young Calvin Harris—2009's

"Dance Wiv Me"—a performance with Florence + the Machine at the 2010 Brit Awards, and a verse on Jessie J's 2013 single, "Wild." For many, the pivot felt notable, especially considering the MC had come up by writing thoughtfully and articulately about life in the socially and economically hopeless East London, a far cry from "Dance Wiv Me's" "You got a body to die for / ...now it's murder on the dance floor." Rascal deserved any pop success he got, but some read the change in focus as a sign that the essence of grime was beginning to dissipate into everything that Grime had previously disavowed: being well-mannered, safe, compliant, fake, and a sell-out.

This move away from the creatively fertile early period and towards a more mainstream audience saw a period of upheaval for the genre. Both Skepta and Wiley traded in their more thoughtful, provoking rhymes, choosing instead to produce singles about their Rolexes. Although the two MCs had, like Rascal, certainly earned the right to flaunt success, the choices felt similarly strategic. Neither had achieved full stardom and grime itself remained an unknown, despite their years of brilliance. Still, the worry was that they were failing to remain true to their history, where they came from, and the revolutionary energy of the music; the things that made grime so important and exciting in the first place. The Rolex singles, like Rascal's crossover attempts, did not push grime, always a site of stunning innovation, forward. Instead, the MCs sounded, for the first time, like conventional mainstream rappers, a shift that could have potentially signalled a dramatic about-face for a traditionally nonconformist genre.

If, at that point, grime had lost touch with its roots, its revitalization was completed by Skepta's 2014 single "That's Not Me," featuring JME. The song is a return to unapologeticness, something Skepta and others had been trying to come to terms with during the years they spent attempting to balance authenticity and getting paid. JME's feature on Wiley's 2014 track, "From the Outside," describes his struggle with the spectre of success: "Don't wanna make tunes that are bait/ I make music for an acquired taste/ Started doing this thing cause I loved it/ Not to make tunes for the general public." Grime, he argues here, might never be mainstream, but that would be missing the point: grime is a culture of counter-culture. Skepta and JME's new attitude brought a spark to the music; the genre was pushing forward again, and a more organic success began to take shape. Skepta in particular has driven the charge, and has succeeded in breaking into the North American market on an unprecedented scale. The self-styled "King of Grime" has leveraged public friendships with stars such as Drake and Kanye West to command a large spotlight, and his renewed focus on keeping true to himself and his history has resonated, peaking (for the moment) with the release of his album *Konnichiwa* in 2016. *Konnichiwa* was a massive success, winning the Mercury Prize for the UK's album of the year—the first grime album to do so since Dizzee Rascal's groundbreaking *Boy In Da Corner* won in 2003—and reasonating internationally with successful singles like "That's Not Me" and "Shutdown."

The grime movement is very self-aware. In order to understand grime and what grime is about, all you have to do is listen to the artists, who will not hesitate to tell you—boy better know—everything that you need to know about what grime represents. The music and the lifestyle, the artists' assert, is about remaining true to themselves, to grime, to the crew, and to where they come from. On "That's Not Me," Skepta chooses to throw his Gucci "in the bin 'cause that's not me." It is a masterstroke, simultaneously bringing the movement back to its roots, negotiating the path to success they have spent years grappling with, and laying claim to a future where the old guard and up-and-comers like Stormzy and Novelist can be stars on both sides of the ocean without foregoing innovation, nonconformity, or being true to themselves. BBK is the team, and boy, you better know that it is grime's time to triumph on the North American stage.

© Photo by Samuel Bradley.

## *MY WOMAN*
## ANGEL OLSEN

*Anu*

*Jagjaguwar*

A lover of wisdom through loving, Angel Olsen captures relationships with people who could be made out of light if only they would let their heart's wick catch fire. They are not free lovers; they are expectation's slaves—expectation Olsen challenges when she dares her loves to understand what makes her a woman.

Her love: honest, free, eternally fuelled by vulnerability; her sound: sown and grown.
She masters simple and honest prose that expresses complicated, distinct tones of experience. The conviction of every Angelic amalgamation of sounds and words, and her sonic maturation, make this celestially majestic album radiate.

## *22, A MILLION*
## BON IVER

*Fan Wu*

*Jagjaguwar*

In 2016, the folk sensation who once locked himself up in a remote Wisconsin cabin finds himself down in the belly of the machine. His delicate, strained voice is fractured into multiplicity by vocoder effects; the music glitches out as though your headphone wires have snapped. What has not changed in the decade since For Emma? Those brashly emoting horns and his exceptional lyrics, at the very brink of legibility: "A word about Gnosis: it ain't gonna buy the groceries / Or middle-out locusts, or weigh to find." Succulent with sonic play, 22, A Million warps you into desperate survival in a cybernetic wilderness tinged by apocalypse.

## *COLORING BOOK*
## CHANCE THE RAPPER

*Felipe Vallejo*

*self-released*

Few of 2016's albums have come close to the standard that *Coloring Book* set in early May. Building on his success with 2013's *Acid Rap*, Chance released an even better album that found a way to expand his sound into A-list territory without surrendering his roots. The album functions as a story of his life, with various songs focusing on his relationships, friendships, and work. Through it all, you can feel the emotion that he puts into this music, leaving you with a lasting impression of the once Chicago high school dropout and now big-time star.

## *CHALEUR HUMAINE*
## CHRISTINE AND THE QUEENS

*Adam Davey*

*Because Music*

*Chaleur Humaine* opens up like a house of mirrors, with a skittering, minimalist production style that reveals just enough extraneous detail—a looped string harmony here, a sparse piano chord there—to tease out French sensation Héloïse "Christine" Letissier's hauntingly infectious pop melodies. Seemingly infinite in scope, the album feels introverted but never contrived, with Letissier musing on gender, social isolation, and depression with a playful knowingness. You get the sense that Letissier's identity is in flux—even the lyrics merge English and French, to dislocating effect—but the confusion seems quietly comforting. Indeed, the breakout hit's mantra affirms it: "I am actually good/can't help it if we're tilted."

## *ATROCITY EXHIBITION*
## DANNY BROWN

*Isaac Fox*

*Warp*

After three years of self-imposed exile, Danny Brown re-emerges. *Atrocity Exhibition* is a dark, lyrically dense, and often hilarious journey through Detroit, poverty, drug addiction, and the rapper's own psyche. Take "Downward Spiral," the opener; in the span of two verses, Brown attempts threesomes, hears voices, grinds his teeth down to chiclets, and passes out in his bathrobe while smoking squares. Other highlights include four-on-the-floor heater "When It Rain," the reflective "Tell Me What I Don't Know," and the year's most stacked posse cut, "Really Doe." Add caustic beats rooted in Post-Punk, Grime, and Detroit House, and you have Brown's most boundary-pushing album yet.

*Captured Tracks*

### *IS THE IS ARE*
### DIIV

*Helena Najm*

DIIV's follow-up to 2013's *Oshin* is a mature continuation of the beachy, feedback-laden style that initially attracted their cult following, but its seventeen tracks offer enough stylistic variety to appeal to most listeners. The album is cohesive, crafting a world that feels like an escape and yet remains grounded, through its honest lyrics and intimate vocal delivery, in the harsh topical reality of addiction. As a bonus, it's supplemented by a great Sky Ferreira cameo, wherein she does her best Kim Gordon impression à la "Tunic." I cannot think of another album this year that I have reached for more often for accompaniment or as a retreat.

# BEST ALBUMS of 2016

*self-released*

### *HANA*
### HANA

*Hazel Sands*

2016 saw Hana Pestle's first foray into the synthpop world, the self-titled *HANA*. The EP creates a dreamlike fantasy that is permeated by soft vocals, melodic synthesizer, and relaxed beats—a step away from her past acoustic and alternative rock sound. Pestle showcases her wide vocal range with her soaring and operatic lyrical progressions. We see the fluidity of her vocal and musical talents on tracks like "Clay" and "Avalanche," as she effortlessly weaves her voice into an otherworldly vibe. *HANA* is a story of a young woman coming into herself musically and emotionally, evolving her creativity and putting it on display for the world.

*Westbury Road Entertainment*

### *ANTI*
### RIHANNA

*Dora Boras*

Before 2016, I did not consider myself to be very invested in Rihanna or her work—she was just another Pop giant. *ANTI* changed that—in the place of my disinterest, it built a shrine.This album, to me, is undeniably the soundtrack to this past year. Rihanna's sultry, expressive voice, paired with candid lyrics and Dancehall influences, creates an atmosphere of intimacy and honesty. *ANTI* is mesmerizing and seductive; a galvanizing moment in her long career. This new energy sets *ANTI* far apart from her earlier radio-friendly hits, making it feel almost rebellious. I am restless to see to where this new attitude will take her next album.

*Domino Recording Company*

### *EVERYTHING YOU'VE COME TO EXPECT*
### THE LAST SHADOW PUPPETS

*Anita Abedini*

The Arctic Monkey's Alex Turner and pop-rocker Miles Kane join forces again for their second LP as The Last Shadow Puppets. *Everything You've Come To Expect (EYCTE)* tackles a wide range of emotions, including love, lust, and deceit, with the same silky wit and pointed lyrical style that have always set Turner in particular apart. Owen Pallett's ravishing string arrangement gives a cinematic edge to tracks like "Aviation" and "Sweet Dreams, TN," though it helps to have two incredibly charismatic frontmen interacting seamlessly on stage. *EYCTE* is full of surprising moments, capturing everything that makes The Last Shadow Puppets stand out.

## Angelo Gio Mateo

Angelo is an undergraduate student studying International Relations and History. He's a Filipino-Canadian boy who grew up in Mississauga. He loves talking about the Raptors, politics, and music. He hosts a podcast, "Shooting the Sh*t with Angelo Gio Mateo," and writes about music for demo and the Newspaper. Follow his blog at angelogiomateo.ca/blog/ or his Twitter at @angelogiomateo.

## Arman Adel

Arman thinks music is aight.

## Christian Schoug

Christian is an English student and Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Acta Victoriana*.

## Harry Myles

Harry is a second-year student majoring in International Relations and minoring in Political Science and History. After being a contributor last year, Harry is excited to now be a staff writer for *demo*. He is a fan of jazz, blues, hip-hop, R&B, and a bunch of other genres.

## Isaac Fox

Isaac is a third-year student studying International Relations and History. Aside from writing for *demo* and drowning in schoolwork, he teaches Cuban Salsa, plays soccer, and makes tons of beats and remixes.

## Kalina Nedelcheva

Kalina is a fourth-year student majoring in Books and Media Studies and Philosophy. Her hobbies include pizza, music, coffee-induced comas, and drawing until 3AM in the morning.

# B U T O R S

# CONTRI-

## Dayapartap "Daven" Boporai

Daven is a second-year student from Michigan who has no clue what he's doing. He likes turtlenecks and window shopping on SSENSE for coats he can't afford. Catch him listening to Tame Impala, Beach House, or Das Racist on any given day.

## Emma Kelly

Emma is a first-year English major.

## Grace Guimond

Cheap whine.

## Paul Ciurea

Paul is a first-year undergrad who loves music and writing. He listens to sad British post-punk music (amongst other stuff) and mopes about not being allowed into 19+ shows.

## Rachel Evangeline Chiong

Rachel majors in Linguistics and is double minoring in Near and Middle Eastern Studies and East Asian Studies. This is the third year Degree Explorer is reminding her to regret her decision to do so, but she is a tough, small, iron-willed blossom.

## Samantha Capaldi

Samantha is in her fourth-year as an English specialist with a minor in Creative Expression and Society. Like The Weeknd, she comes alive in the Fall time, and Boy Better Know she is daydreaming that she is at Glastonbury instead of studying.

## Savana James

Savana is a fourth-year Book and Media Studies student who loves R&B music almost as much as she loves the Kardashians. When she›s not searching the internet for music with cool vibes she›s probably either writing down all her feelings or complaining.

## Shaquilla Singh

Shaquilla is "chaotic neutral, like chilled out but w lots of emotions abt stuff," according to one long-time friend. She verified the "chaotic neutral" alignment with a Buzzfeed quiz because she values Truth. She double majors in Computer Science and the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology.

## Yiqi Luo (Betty)

Betty is a first-year student studying Humanities. She has been playing Guzheng for fourteen years. She is passionate about learning and incorporating music from different cultures into her musical repertoire. She has been working with a wide range of instruments, including the guitar, ukulele, flute, piano, clarinet, french horn, violin, and drum!

“HERE TO RECLAIM SPACE ON AN EVERYDAY NOTION.”

BLAK MATILDA
(BizZarh)